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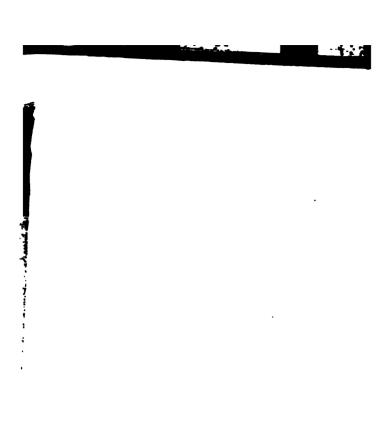
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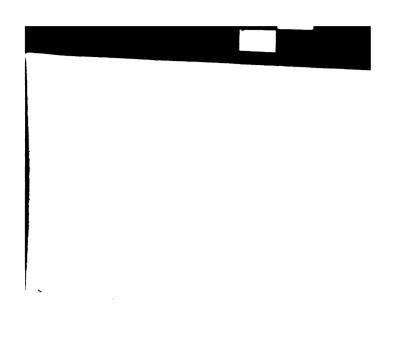












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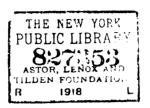
THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

By

LEIGHTON GRAVES OSMUN



NEW YORK
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1914



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INVICTUS

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years

Finds and shall find me unafraid.

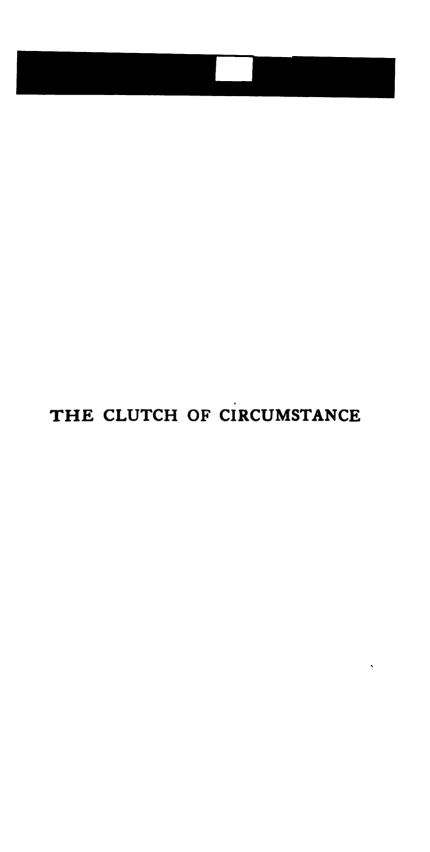
It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.





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CHAPTER I

THERE are days in spring so perfect that the human mind can imagine nothing more beautiful, days when the heavy scent of blossoms fills the air, and the rich odor of the warm earth and young growing things enters the blood, and imbues one with vague ecstasy.

On such a day a young woman was sitting at a piano in one of the houses on the main street of Harbury. This street straightens itself out self-consciously from a rambling country road, and runs primly in a decorous, straight line through the village beneath the spreading branches of stately elms. It passes a group of small stores, and then continues its uneventful way between dwellings fronted by small but scrupulously kept lawns, until it reaches the farther end of town, where, freed from the restraining atmosphere of the little Puritan village,

it takes to ambling crookedly again under the careless indulgence of Mother Nature.

The girl at the piano was as dainty as the flowers with which the room was filled, and she was happy; from her golden brown hair to the tip of her little, shiny slipper peeping out from under her white frilled skirt, she breathed youth and joy. The most caviling of Harbury critics had to admit that she was pretty, though they hotly contested her claims to beauty; she was too small, they said, and her features lacked the classic lines which appealed more strongly to them. Then there was something about her appearance which annoyed them, but which they could explain in no more definite way than to say that she was "Frenchy looking." Yet it was no doll-like prettiness that she possessed. Her chin might be dainty, but it was firm; her lips might suggest kisses, yet they could be set in a stern, forbidding straight line; her eyes might seem melting and tender, but they could, if the occasion arose, flash fire. Masked behind her cheeriness and dainty loveliness was the character handed down to her through a long line of Puritan ancestry.

A like contrast showed itself in her surroundings. The house was furnished, instead of austerely, as one would have supposed had one gazed upon it from the outside, comfortably and with

even a kind of modest luxury. The stiff, haircloth furniture and abominable crayons of relatives were conspicuous by their absence. The house was a bone of contention to the other residents of Harbury; the older generation looked upon it as a leaning towards the flesh-pots of Egypt, while the younger, and consequently more tolerant, considered it perfect, and copied it either in their own homes or in their dreams of what their homes would be like when they possessed them.

Nor was the girl herself less a subject of comment. The Harbury God is a hard god, a jealous god, who is supposed to look at all joy, not of the religious kind, askance, and she was too happy, too care-free, too filled with the joy of living, and, worst of all, she was trying to make her husband like herself.

Now she ran her fingers over the keys and sang with all the abandon of complete happiness. She threw back her head and her white throat fluttered with melody. No bird, pouring out its soul amid the blossoming foliage, was more care-free, more contented than she.

And at last he came, his long strides crunching heavily on the graveled walk. He threw open the door and filled the doorway with his massive frame. She sprang to meet him, and beat her hands happily against his great chest before he could stoop

over sufficiently for her to clasp them around his neck.

"Hello!" he said in feigned surprise, "what is the house all trimmed up for?"

She laughed joyfully. "As if you could forget, you old fraud."

"No," he admitted, "I have not forgotten. We were married a year ago to-day."

He stood stroking her hair clumsily, his stern face softened and tender.

"Kiss me, John," she cried gayly; "kiss me and then laugh. Oh, John, let's be so happy to-night and just laugh and dance and sing—that is, I will dance and sing, and you shall laugh, you great owl!"

She danced away from him, leaving him standing there with an expression of puzzled embarrassment on his face. He could never follow her into these lighter moods. He could not even understand them, but if now and then a shade of disapproval entered his mind he crushed it, almost before it made itself felt.

Suddenly she sobered, and, going over to the table, picked up a tiny garment and held it up to him. "See, dear, what I made to-day; isn't it pretty?"

He took it awkwardly in his huge hands, and

gazed down on it with reverent awe. Then silently he took her in his arms.

They passed out into the dining-room together. "Let me go now, dear," she said gently, "I must bring the supper in."

He kissed her, and sat down at the table, the light of a great emotion in his eyes.

John Lawson was not a handsome man; his features were too large and stern, his jaw too square, his eyes, deep set under shaggy eyebrows, glowed too somberly, yet his was a face that gave the impression of limitless power and equally limitless tenacity of purpose. One would say, on looking at him, that he was a man who would go far. reality he was only thirty, yet he looked older. There were lines in his face which could have been produced only by stalwart fighting in the battle of, life. John had been fighting ever since he was ten years old. When he was that age, his father died, leaving to John and his mother a mortgaged farm on a stony New England hillside. John persuaded his mother to sell the farm, and move into Harbury, where he obtained a position in a grocery store. The owner, unable to meet the competition of a later rival, became discouraged. John managed to raise enough money to buy him out. made the business pay, but there were in his mind loftier ambitions than the ownership of a grocery

store in Harbury; even now he was planning the next step.

"Ruth," he said, when she had come in from the kitchen bearing a dish of delicious-looking biscuits, "Sam Brunt wants to sell his store in Chester. I am thinking of buying it. I am calculating on getting a chain of stores all over the state, and I will before I'm through."

Instantly she was alert:

"How much does he ask?"

John named a figure.

She shook her head. "It is too much. Sam has allowed the business to run down; it is worth no more than the fixtures."

He smiled:

"And what are they worth?"

In turn she named a figure.

"Sam told me," he said reflectively, "that his business had been better last year than ever before. Of course I will find out when I look over his books, but——"

"Then why does he want to sell?" she retorted.

"He says his wife is sick—wants to move away."

"Have you seen his wife?"

" No."

"Well, I have," she said, smiling. "I saw her yesterday. She does not look much like an invalid."

He thought a moment. "How do you know that Sam's business has run down?"

A gleam of fun came into her eyes. "You went to Chester three times last week. You covered your cuffs with figures, and forgot to answer when I spoke to you. I put two and two together, and ferreted out your dread secret. Then I gossiped a little with my neighbors. Chester isn't more than a hundred miles from here."

"You went there?"

"No; I invited Aunt Sally over here. She knows everything about everybody, and is willing to tell—under pressure."

His admiration shone in his eyes. "I will have to make you my partner."

"I'd rather be your wife," she retorted. "Your last partner did not last long."

"Oh, Finn Jones? He was a worthless cuss."

Her face became grave. "You must not allow yourself to become hard, John," she cautioned. "Finn was not worthless. He had had a good many setbacks, and naturally was more timid about going ahead than you. Besides, you two were of entirely different temperaments. Finn was a plodder, used to the old, slow ways, while you were quick, energetic. It was like hitching up a plow horse with a thoroughbred. You worried each other; I do not doubt that you worried

Finn quite as much as he worried you. Poor Finn," she went on more gently. "Bad luck seems to have pursued him. You know he was doing well in Dakota when the wind and rain spoiled all his wheat. Then he came back here, and just as he was getting a fresh start his barn burned down with all his season's hay crop. I hate to hear you call him worthless—he always works so hard."

He laughed. "Have it your own way, then. By the way, I have to drive over to Bradbury's to-night to deliver an order, which came in too late to catch the wagon."

- "Oh, do you have to?" she said regretfully. "Why can't you let it go until to-morrow, to-night is——"
- "I know," he said, "but business is the main thing nowadays. We must think of that first. Prince will get me there and back in an hour or so."
- "Do you think it safe to drive Prince?" she said anxiously. "He's so fractious—and especially at night——"
- "Nonsense," he returned. "He's just a little skittish, like all colts. I'll soon take that out of him."
- "But I have a feeling that it is not just because he's a colt that he acts the way he does. I feel that

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he is wicked, John, that he means to injure you if he can."

"You seem to give Prince credit for a fine reasoning mind," he said, laughing.

She did not respond to his laughter. "I wish you would sell Prince," she urged. "Won't you—for my sake?"

He good-naturedly changed the subject. He did not intend to give up the battle he had been waging against the horse for the last month until Prince was thoroughly subdued. Then, and not until then, would he be willing to sell him.

It was late when they rose from the table. "I'll have to hurry," he said, "or the Bradburys will be in bed. Will you sit up for me? I'd like a glass of milk and some crackers when I get home. I'll probably be hungry."

"Oh, yes, I'll wait for you, but you had better hurry back or the neighbors will be inventing all sorts of reasons for your absence. Old Mrs. Hendy, across the street, will be delightfully sure that you have eloped, and the disappointment when you return will be a severe shock to her."

He laughed, but with reserve. He never entirely could become used to her flippant way of speaking. He kissed her and went out.

CHAPTER II

JOHN passed around the side of the house, and went back to the stable. He pulled open the heavy swinging doors, and, taking a lantern from a hook, lighted it. There was a friendly whinny from one of the stalls, and Dolly, the old gray mare, put forth her head to be caressed. Her whole manner seemed to breathe an assurance of affection and trust.

But in the next stall there was no such demonstration of affection, or even of tolerance. Prince, a black gelding, snorted in anger at the interruption of his evening meal. He hated this man who had bound him to servitude. His heart raged within him at the thought of his own impotence, for time and time again he had sought to gain his freedom, only to undergo the humiliation of being conquered. He laid back his ears, and his eyes showed rims of white beneath the pupils.

"We're going for a drive, old boy," said John cheerfully. He felt that the horse wished him to resent his behavior and took delight in tormenting him.

Prince glared at him evilly. When John came

behind the horse with the harness, Prince crouched down against the side of the stall.

"Move over there, Prince," John said sharply.

The horse did not move. His ears clung closer to his head, and his lips twitched open, showing his yellow teeth. John's quick temper flared up:

"So you're looking for a fight, are you? Well, you'll get it." He took down a heavy strap from the wall and advanced upon the horse, his face dark with anger.

Prince heard the swish and nerved himself for the blow. He flinched, but that was all. Again came the sudden, merciless sting; he crouched, but held his position. Again—he snorted with pain; flesh and blood could not stand this! He moved sullenly over, and in a second John was in the stall and had laid hold of the halter rope. The horse was helpless for the time being, and submitted sulkily to being backed between the shafts and hitched up to the buggy. Then he trotted submissively down the drive.

Ruth, standing at the window, wondered. "I guess I was foolish about him," she said to herself. "He seems gentle enough now." She waved her hand to John, and stood watching until the carriage was lost to her sight.

John settled back to enjoy the drive. In a moment they had passed through the village and were

out in the country. The night was clear, and the low, musical hum of myriads of insects was borne to his ears pleasantly. The katydid proclaimed shrilly her centuries-old accusation, and the bull-frog boomed out his melancholy bass in a neighboring swamp. The rising moon threw the long shadows of the trees across the road in strange, distorted shapes, between which glistened patches of pure white.

He cast a look around at the beauties of the night, then forgot them, and fell to thinking of Sam Brunt and his business. Presently his thoughts took a different turn.

"Women are funny," he said to himself. "How Ruth did pitch into me about Finn Jones! But I was right," he went on doggedly, "Finn is a worthless cuss. If he hadn't been speculating and sowing more than he ought, the loss of his wheat wouldn't have ruined him, and, if he had taken insurance on his barn, its burning down wouldn't have knocked him out. The trouble is, Finn is shiftless, and he is one of those fellows who are always blatting about circumstances. A man makes his own circumstances, if he is any good. Napoleon said something like that once, and he was dead right. There isn't anything that can down a man if he is determined to get on. I ought to know—thrown out on the world when I was nothing but a child,

with a mother to support. Supposing I had sat down and begun to cry about circumstances, where would I have been? But I got out and hustled—that's all a man has to do, hustle and keep on hustling—and use a little common sense."

He laughed. "Yes, that's what Finn lacks, hustle and common sense. Work! Lord, he doesn't know what work is; just rushes at a thing—and then drops it."

From time to time, John felt a vague surprise at Prince's unusual docility, but that it had any significance never once entered his mind; if it had occurred to him, he would have laughed it away. He was one of the men who believe only what can be proved. This class of men are called hard-headed and clear-thinking by their own generation, but how are they characterized by the next?

The miles rolled leisurely away behind; Prince was not traveling at his accustomed speed. Finally John thought of a thick, black cigar in his pocket. He reached for it, and settled it between his teeth, searching through his pockets for a match. At first he could not find one.

"What infernal luck!" he growled.

But there was one, and at last he found it. Instantly it assumed an important place in his life. There it was—his last match. Should the wind—there was a gentle breeze blowing—extinguish it,

he would be plunged into the deepest gloom. On the other hand, if its flame lasted long enough to ignite the cigar, he would be happy out of all proportion to the cause. He examined the head, and was gratified to find that it was large and well formed. It was a worthy sample of its class. He considered gravely whether he had better strike it on the sole of his shoe or on the iron alongside the seat, and decided in favor of the iron; his shoe might be damp from walking across the lawn at home. He stopped Prince, and half turned in his seat to face the wind.

Prince knew, by the inexplicable instinct which animals have, that his master was off his guard. He gathered himself for a spring. The match flared up. He was off like a shot.

John's first thought was one of anger that he had failed to get a light. He swore at the horse, and jerked viciously on the lines. But Prince had the bit firmly between his teeth, and John's strength counted for no more than the puny efforts of a child. Slowly it dawned on the man that the horse was running away. A mile ahead, less than a mile, there was a sharp turn in the road where it ran alongside a gully. If he could not stop Prince before that was reached, the chances were that there would be a bad accident. A sudden fear of impending disaster clutched at his heart, but he

dismissed the fear almost as soon as it was born. He had conquered the animal before,—he would do it again.

Prince was fired with the thought of success. At last he was the master: that helpless thing back there in the wagon was his to do with as he pleased. And he meant to kill him, kill him if it meant his own death as well. Prince knew as exactly as did John where the gully was, and into it he meant to hurl himself, pulling after him the carriage in which was the man he hated.

A savage joy, the heritage of some wild ancestor of the plains, awoke in him and wrought a frenzy in his brain. An irresistible passion for liberty surged through his veins. His nostrils dilated, and he shook his head joyfully. What mattered it whether or not he died? He was free—free! Every hoof-beat cried out in exultation—he was free!

The man did not lose his head; he exerted every trick of horsemanship he knew, but it was useless; the maddened horse resisted all efforts at control. They were nearing the gully now, John could see the trees lining its edge. It was characteristic of the man that he never once thought of jumping: he was one of the kind who stick to the ship until the last.

Could he make the turn? There was one chance in a thousand. He gathered himself for the effort. A second, and they had reached the bend. John

rose in his seat, and threw the whole weight of his body on the left rein. It snapped.

Another second and they were over the brink. There was a snort of pain from Prince, a sickening crash. Something struck the man on the head, and darkness spread before his eyes, but even in that moment his dominance of character asserted itself, even then he would not admit defeat. He struggled against the blackness that was closing in on him, straining open his eyes, gripping frantically at his receding consciousness.

Could this be his end? No—he would not believe it.

CHAPTER III

AFTER the carriage had passed out of sight, Ruth turned away from the window, and took up her sewing. Prince's seeming gentleness had reassured her. "Maybe I was foolish about him," she said to herself.

The intense happiness of the afternoon had given way to a deep content. It seemed wonderful to her that she had John's love, and he was so big and strong, so well able to protect her against the world. She felt sorry for women married to weak. insignificant men. As she stitched on the small garment, she looked out confidently into the joyladen future. Her crowning happiness of all was yet to come: she was to be a mother. At times it seemed to her as if she would be smothered by the emotion that surged into her breast when she thought of her child. Motherhood was not a light matter to her; she looked upon it as a sacred privilege. She prayed nightly that she might be worthy. might bring up her child to be good and true, to love his fellow-man and respect his Maker. If it were a boy, she would wish him to be like John, to grow up big and strong and masterful.

would not want him to be quite so stern, though. A tiny pucker appeared in her brow, but the next instant it was smoothed away. She hoped the child would be a boy, yet sometimes the companionship of a daughter appealed to her more, a daughter who would love her, and care for her when she was old.

Finally she laid aside her sewing, and leaned back in her chair, giving herself up to pleasurable thoughts. Gradually her eyelids drooped. She slept.

She was awakened by a feeling of apprehension. It seemed almost as if John were crying out to her.

She started up. "What is it, John?" she called. "I am here—here in the library."

But no John answered. She ran to the door, and looked out on the porch. She went around the corner of the house, and back to the barn, but it was empty, save for old Dolly, who was placidly crunching on her hay. She returned uncertainly to the house.

"I must have been dreaming," she told herself, yet the vague impression of disaster remained.

She looked at the clock. It was after nine. John should have been home before this. In a flash it came to her; there had been an accident, and John needed her. Without waiting to get her hat and coat, she ran to the barn.

"I must harness up Dolly, and go to him," she said to herself.

It was hard to take the heavy harness from the peg, it was hard to fit it onto Dolly's back. Ruth was very small, and the horse was large. The girl had to stand on a box which rocked precariously, standing as it did on the straw in the stall. She could not have put on the bridle at all had not Dolly lowered her head helpfully.

"We must go to John," she kept telling the horse. "We must hurry, we must go to John."

She led the gray mare out, and backed her between the shafts of the delivery wagon; it was the only vehicle left.

All this time she would allow but one thought to possess her mind—she must reach John as quickly as possible, but now, when she climbed into the wagon, and there was nothing to do but wait, while Dolly plodded along, the full force of terror swept over her. She could see the accident as if it were happening before her eyes,—the frightened, plunging horse, the efforts of his driver to quiet him, the sudden dash forward, the carriage striking against a tree, or no—the gully!

Yes; that was the place: she was sure of it. Prince had overturned the carriage down the gully. A sob of dismay escaped from her lips. She urged Dolly on. The beauty of the night grated on her

nerves. Was it possible that this was the same night that she had thought so perfect? Now everything was changed. In every shadow lurked a fear, in every patch of moonlight John's face, white and cold. There was a sinister quality in the air, and the breeze, stirring the tree-tops, drew from them moans and sighings. A tall tree, shattered by lightning, raised its gaunt arms to heaven, standing ghostly in the moonlight, and she almost cried out at the sight of it. The howling of a dog in the distance brought added terror to her heart. She remembered the old wives' fable, that a dog always howls when some one dies.

"John," she cried wildly, "wait for me! I am coming!" She spoke the words again and again, as if he could hear them.

Then her mind became calmer. "I must not be foolish," she told herself. "It may have been only a dream."

Hope, so far lying dormant, sprang up. "Maybe when I go around the next turn in the road I shall see him driving along, and find that nothing has happened."

Under the sway of the new emotion, she could almost hear his laugh when he saw her, and afterwards his tender words, when he knew how frightened she had been.

But the bend was passed, and John did not come.

Disappointment, coming swiftly on the heels of hope, doubled her fears. She could believe only the worst now. Her mind reeled under its misery, and her heart beat in great, straining throbs, that shook her whole body. Her hands trembled so that she could hardly hold the reins.

It seemed countless ages before the gully came in sight. She was so sure that it was there the disaster had occurred that she scarcely looked along the rest of the road. Now she stood up, lashing Dolly frantically, and calling out to her, for God's sake to hurry! Her tone aroused the old gray mare to a sense of calamity, and she broke into a lumbering gallop. Ruth strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the hand-rail at the edge of the gully. If that were unbroken! At first she thought it was. It seemed to stretch its silver threadlike course uninterrupted along the edge of the abyss. A cry of joy broke from her lips. How foolish she had been! She raised her head, and drank in the cool night air. How beautiful everything was! chirp of the crickets came to her ear like a benediction. The breeze echoed her relief in friendly murmurings among the tree-tops. Some wild flowers by the roadside offered up their fragrance as an incense. Everything was peaceful and beautiful. Yes, she had been foolish. It had been only a dream. Probably John had taken the other road

home, and that is why she had missed meeting him. She looked up at the stars, and smiled.

Then her eyes came back to the hand-rail. Her heart seemed to stop beating. There, in the middle, was a great gap. She could see the splintered ends. One piece, broken off, lay on the brink of the gully, pointing derisively down into the blackness.

She stopped the horse, and half climbed, half fell out of the wagon, and gazed fearfully down into the darkness. She could distinguish nothing but the trees and underbrush, yet she knew that somewhere down there was John, perhaps, probably, dead. Without thinking, she sprang down the steep incline. She fell, rolling over and over, striking against trees and bushes, until, bruised and breathless, she brought up against the shattered buggy. She lay still a moment, stunned; then she sat up weakly.

"John!" she called, in a trembling voice. "Oh, John!"

There was no answer, save the erratic beating of her own heart. She stared about her wildly, seeking to pierce the gloom. She tried to rise to her feet, but found that she lacked the strength. She crawled forward, groping for her husband, crying out to him, hoping against hope that he might hear her. Her body was full of pain now, and

she felt deathly sick and faint, but she clenched her teeth. "I must find him. I must," she sobbed.

She crawled aimlessly this way and that, often covering the same ground a second and third time. Then she stopped, and considered.

"I will never find him this way," she moaned.
"I must take each side separately."

And at last she found him, lying in an inert heap. She fell upon him, covering his cold face with kisses, begging him to speak to her. Suddenly his eyelids fluttered under her lips.

"He is alive," she told herself in a kind of wondering joy. "John is alive. I must get help."

She staggered to her feet, imbued with new strength. But how could she ever get out of the gully? She forced her mind back to steady action. There must be a way out. She used to come here and play with her dolls when she was a little girl. Yes, there must be a way, but where? She stood swaying, holding to a tree for support. Where was it? Oh! now she knew; there was a path leading up from the little stream, but where was the stream? She held her breath, listening for the gurgle of its waters. She heard it, faintly at first, then louder as she made her unsteady way toward it. And she found the path winding steeply up the bank. She wondered how she could ever accomplish the climb. She remembered that even as a

child she could hardly do it, and she had been a strong, agile youngster. Now! She paused in despair. Then she rallied herself. "It is for John," she urged. "I must do it for John."

She started up, slipping, crawling, grasping at bushes for aid, clawing at stones, until her hands were torn and bleeding. But she would not give up. It was for John. She must—for John! Half-way up she fainted, but with the first glimmer of consciousness she struggled on. The path was not so steep here, and she gained inch by inch.

At last she reached the top, and sought to climb into the wagon. She tried again and again, but fell back exhausted. So she desisted, and, clinging weakly to Dolly's bridle, turned her faltering steps toward the nearest house.

Fortunately the farmer was just locking up for the night, when the little cavalcade moved up to the door, and so he heard Ruth stagger onto the porch. He opened the door and stood looking in amazement at the bedraggled figure. She whispered the news, and fell fainting at his feet. He picked her up, and carried her with rough tenderness into the house, and gave her into his wife's charge, while he aroused the hired man, and started for the gully.

Then came eternities of time when Ruth's frame was racked with agony, when horrible shapes op-

pressed her dreams—grinning fiends snatching John from her arms, and rending him limb from limb, and her with him. There were blessed intervals of oblivion, then awakenings again to the awful torture. She seemed to be floating in a sea of pain —why, she knew not; there was room in her mind for but one emotion—suffering. Days passed into nights, and nights into other days, but the divisions of time meant nothing to her.

At last glimmering reason returned, and she heard a faint wail and knew. She stretched forth her arms to receive the tiny bundle, but the effort was too great, and blackness overpowered her. From time to time she roused to hear the wailing cry, and it comforted her, but there came a day when she heard it no more. She asked for her baby, pleading with her eyes, for she was too weak to speak, and they endeavored to soothe her with endearing meaningless phrases.

As soon as she could talk, she demanded her child. They lied to her at first, and tried to quiet her, but she would not be quieted. So at last they told her—the child was dead. She gave one despairing cry, and sank into unconsciousness. After this she hovered on the border line between life and death for weeks. When she again became conscious, she did not ask for the child, nor did she refer to it. Now her one hope was John.

CHAPTER IV

NEVER, in its recent history, had Harbury known such a sensation as that to which it awoke on the morning after the accident. The news flew from mouth to mouth until there was not a man, woman, or child in the village who was ignorant of the fact that John Lawson had been probably fatally injured, and that his wife also was lying at the point of death. It was on the stroke of seven when Doctor Northall, leaving John's house, told Jed Tyler, who happened to be passing. At seven-fifteen it would have been impossible to surprise a person in Harbury with the news; everyone had heard it.

In the human mind there is a craving for excitement which at times overshadows every other emotion. Especially is this craving rampant in small villages where excitement is a rarity. It is safe to say that Harbury as a whole had not been as happy as it was that day since the spectacular fire which had destroyed Finn Jones's barn.

Nor did the excitement die down when it was learned that a child had been born to Ruth and that both it and the mother were very near to death. When it did die, a public funeral was planned by

the farmer's wife, at whose house Ruth was lying unconscious. All Harbury turned out to this funeral. Mrs. Bradbury rose from a bed of sickness to attend, and basked in the light of reflected importance, for it had been her house to which John was going when the accident happened. As she said, if she had not taken a notion to run into the store and order a case of canned corn, the accident would not have occurred. She was, therefore, looked upon as a modest tool in the hands of Providence.

The obsequies of the tiny mite were rendered more interesting by the fact that it had not been baptized before it died, and discussion ran high as to whether or not its soul had found a refuge in heaven. It may seem strange that anyone would attribute to the Deity the damning of a soul—least of all a baby's soul—on a mere technicality, but it is hardly stranger than the opinion held by practically all of Harbury, that it was God Himself who had brought about the accident as a punishment for the sinful levity of John Lawson's wife.

But as the weeks went by, and neither John nor Ruth died, the excitement subsided, to be replaced by a vague disappointment—the inexplicable feeling of regret one has on looking through an obituary column, and finding there the name of no one whom one knows. Still there was one interesting

topic of conversation left—the financial condition of the Lawsons.

John was still unconscious and helpless, and those who had it direct from Doctor Northall declared that he would never be any better. His mother was trying to run the store, but after the first few days, during which crowds had flocked in to find out, under cover of a purchase, how she was standing the calamity, trade had rapidly fallen off. It was the general verdict that she would have to sell out. The presence of Sam Brunt in Harbury gave color to this prediction, and it was rumored that he had already made an offer which Mrs. Lawson, Sr., was considering.

The dashing of anyone from a pinnacle is always an enlivening sight, and it was not otherwise in this case. John Lawson had been recognized as a coming man, and was envied accordingly, while Ruth's light spirits, and no less, her dresses, had caused jealousy in the breast of feminine Harbury. So the community loudly expressed sympathy, and secretly rejoiced, looking forward to the outcome of all this with as keen interest as was occasioned by the struggles to the death in the Coliseum of ancient Rome.

Ruth did not learn of John's condition for some time. They had told her that John was all right, and explained his absence from her bedside by telling her that he was confined to his house by a broken leg. But when she wished to dictate a letter to him, asking him to write to her, they could keep her no longer in ignorance.

She did not weep, her misery was too great. She lay wordless, praying that she might die, praying with all the religious fervor of her nature that this cup might be permitted to pass from her, that she might sink into grateful death, and be buried with her baby.

But inexorable Nature decreed that she should live, and day by day she felt the strength creep back into her body. Then a new train of thought awakened in her mind; it was her duty to get well so that she might care for John. From the moment this thought laid hold upon her, she did all she could to regain her health. Yet spring melted into summer, and summer hardened into fall, before she was strong enough to be taken home.

It was not until then that she realized the full force of the calamity. Instead of the home to which she had expected to come, she was brought to a little cottage in the poor part of the town, where John and his mother were now living. The lease on the other house had been given up, not, however, without the payment of a bonus, for the old deacon who owned it did not believe in mixing business and charity. The money which had been derived from

the sale of the store was all that stood between them and starvation—and it was a pitifully small sum. John's mother told Ruth all this between sobs, but the news, instead of daunting the girl, stimulated her.

"I will work," she said. "I must hurry and get well, and then I will find something to do. We shall come out all right."

The older woman wrung her hands. "Oh, that my son's wife should come to this!" she moaned.

Ruth put her arms around the trembling form. "Don't worry, mother," she comforted. "Everything will come out all right. I do not mind working. Indeed, it will be best for me to have my mind occupied. And maybe some day John will be well again."

"We can only hope and pray. Oh, Ruth! why has God sent this thing to us? John was always such a good boy. Why should he be stricken down like this? It doesn't seem right. I can't believe that it can be for the best."

Ruth stroked the gray hair. "We must try not to think of it," she said tenderly. "Some day we may know. Will you let me see John now?"

The old lady rose and led the way. "You will see a great difference," she said sadly.

But even this did not prepare Ruth. She staggered back aghast at the sight of his thin, white

face. It seemed to her as if he surely must be dead. He lay as motionless as a corpse, and there was not a sign of color in his face to make it lifelike. It was as white as the bandage bound tightly around his head. Ruth would not have known that it was John at all, from his features. It seemed to her as if it were a stranger lying there. She could hardly persuade herself to go near him, and when she did, and knelt by his bedside, taking his cold hand in hers, she had a feeling of unreality. It seemed impossible that this was her John. She was glad to escape from the room.

That night she helped John's mother to get the supper. She was determined now to be strong; she had a powerful incentive; she must work for John.

The next morning she paid a visit which she had long had in mind.

"Doctor Northall," she began abruptly, when she was admitted to his office, "what are the chances of John's recovery?"

The doctor, a gray-haired old man, his face seamed with the cares and worries of a lifetime of toil for his fellow-man, forced a smile to his face.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "John has a rugged constitution. He is young. Everything is in his favor. He——"

Ruth held up her hand to stop him. "I want



the truth, doctor," she said quietly. "It is mistaken kindness to tell me anything else."

His face became serious. "You are right," he said, after a moment. "The truth is kindest. You ask me what are your husband's chances of recovery. I am afraid, Ruth, that they are slight. There is some obscure process, possibly a clot, exerting pressure at the base of the brain."

"Couldn't an operation be performed?"

He shook his head. "There would not be one chance in a thousand of its being a success. It would probably mean instant death."

"Won't he ever be any better?" faltered Ruth. "Will he always be just as he is now?"

"Not necessarily. If the trouble is from a clot, there is a good chance that it may be absorbed,

and then he will be all right again."

"And if it isn't that—if it is something else?"

"He may die. He may live on for some time as he is."

Ruth rose. "Thank you, doctor, for telling me the truth." She extended her hand, and smiled bravely.

The old man's face twitched. "My brave little virl," he said pityingly. He tried to say more, but his voice choked.

When she had gone, he paced the floor with troubled strides.

"And I am helpless," he groaned. "I am as helpless as a student at his first complicated case. What a fool I am!" He blamed himself for his lack of knowledge. "I am a fool, a poor ignorant fool. If they only had money," he went on despondently, "so that they could command the services of Doctor Winfield or Doctor Barney, I believe the operation could be attempted. It would mean death or a cure, but, God knows, he would be a thousand times better off dead than he is now. Money!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Everything hinges on money. Sometimes I think that those who devote their lives to amassing it are wisest, after all."

Ruth turned back down the street after her conversation with the physician. There was a singular calmness in her mind. Now she could enter the fight without fear of ambush—she knew the worst. As she drew near John's old store, the thought of seeing another name over the door gave a pang. She started to cross the street, intending to go by without looking, but she would not allow herself to be guilty of such weakness. "I will have to get used to it sooner or later," she told herself. When she reached the store, she glanced up at the sign, and nodded to Sam Brunt, standing, fat and complacent, in the doorway. She even forced herself to ask him how the business was

coming on. Then she went on, feeling stronger for the conquest of self.

She met many people she knew, most of whom stopped to sympathize with her, but there was a curiosity showing beneath their sympathy which grated upon her nerves. Only one made her feel true, unaffected sympathy. This one was Finn Jones.

He stopped awkwardly before her, brushing his soft hat nervously between his coarse hands.

"I'm damn sorry, Ruth," he exploded, and grew fiery red.

"I know you are, Finn," she answered, smiling at him, "and I appreciate it."

"Ain't there nuthin' I kin do? Don't ye want anyone to set up with him or nuthin' like thet? I'd be glad if ye'd let me."

"No," she answered, "but if I do want anyone to help me, I will come to you, Finn."

She went on, cheered by the man's kindliness—but the feeling was dashed by her meeting with the minister of the church which she and John had attended. Ruth had never liked the Reverend Doctor Peabody. He was hard and cold; his heart contained little, if any, milk of human kindness. On Christmas and Easter he preached of the love and mercy of God, and on the other fifty Sundays, of His wrath. He loved to dwell upon the torments

of hell, and delighted quite as much that the souls of all who differed from him in their theological views would be thrown into everlasting torment as he did that his own, with a limited number of others, should dwell in everlasting bliss.

Ruth tried to avoid him, but he stopped her, and she was forced to listen while he emphasized the need of her bending her neck to the yoke, and rejoicing in the blow that had come upon her. He intimated that her trouble was a divine plan for her regeneration.

She listened in silence, her heart too bitter to retort, and finally broke away and hurried home.

"To-morrow," she told John's mother, "I will look for something to do."

The older woman protested that it would be better to wait until she was stronger. But Ruth was determined.

"It will be better for me to have something to do. I will begin to look for something to-morrow."

CHAPTER V

Spring had come again, but it brought no happiness to the Lawson household. John's physical condition had improved: he could now sit up in an invalid's chair, but his mentality rose no higher than the cutting out of paper dolls, over which he chattered and crooned like a child of three. sight of him in this condition was agony to Ruth and his mother, and yet they had to praise his efforts or else he felt hurt, and would grow sulky. refusing to eat. At first Doctor Northall had derived hope from the patient's improved health, but as the days went by and John's mind still remained hopelessly feeble, he was led to fear the very worst-that John might live to be an old man, waxing strong in body, while his mind remained a wreck.

Ruth's search for work had proved futile. In Harbury there is a prejudice against a woman's entering commercial life. Her sphere, so the prejudice argues, is the home, and if it is necessary that she earn her daily bread, why then she should enter some other woman's home, where she is permitted to do the menial labor in return for her

board and lodging and a very small sum of money. Or, if she prefer, she may toil long hours with the needle, or take in washing; but enter the rougher, harder commercial life—no!

Ruth had flung herself against this barrier again and again, only to be driven back, for a New England prejudice is not to be beaten down by anything but time, and plenty of it. So at last she had been forced to bow to it, and take in sewing. The pay was meager, and Ruth was neither expert at dressmaking nor was she thick-skinned enough to endure with composure the bullyings of the women for whom she worked, so her life relapsed into longdrawn-out days of misery. Still she toiled on, hoping against hope, but the money she was able to earn was not enough to defray expenses, and her little capital was steadily dwindling, until now she had reached the point when some new endeavor must be undertaken. She laid her sewing wearily aside.

"Mother," she said to the old lady, who was bustling around preparing supper, "it is useless to go on in this way. I cannot make enough to support us here. I must go somewhere else: I must go to a city. New York, I think, would be the best place."

The older woman dropped a dish she was carrying, and it crashed to the floor unnoticed.

"Not that!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, surely not that!"

"I am afraid it must be that," answered Ruth.
"You know how I have tried to get something to
do besides sewing, and I have failed. Our money is
going. In New York I would be able to earn more.
I could soon send for you and John."

The old lady sat down in a chair, and folded her trembling hands.

"If I could only help!" she said sorrowfully. "But I am too old. This morning I went to see Mrs. Braddock. I knew she wanted some one to cook for her, and I am a good cook. I asked her to try me. She meant to be very kind, but I could see that she did not want me because I am so old."

"Oh, mother," remonstrated Ruth, "you shouldn't have done that! It wasn't necessary for you to do that!"

"Ruth," faltered the other, "I can't let you go to New York. I am afraid. Wait a little while longer. Maybe a way will be shown. I can't believe that God has forgotten us. He will come to our aid."

Ruth replied, with a trace of bitterness in her voice: "We have waited. If we wait much longer, we shall be tied hand and foot. I do not like the idea of leaving you, and going to New York, yet it seems the only way. Our money will not last

much longer. When it is gone, it will be too late. We must act now. Besides," she went on more cheerfully, "we shall be separated for only a short time, a few weeks perhaps. As soon as I find a position, and I know it will not be long before I do, I will send for you and John. And I am sure to get on. You know, John always said I was very smart about business. We will live in New York, and we will be happy. Perhaps some day John will be well again."

But the older woman did not share her cheerful view. She had not the buoyant hope of youth. To her it seemed as if Ruth were going amongst a pack of ravening wolves. She feared for the girl. She mistrusted the city. She had seen other girls go out from their homes and enter the gates of the metropolis, some of them to drift back again in after years shattered wrecks, others to be lost sight of completely. A great bitterness welled up in her soul. Was this her reward for a lifetime of right living—to see her son a hopeless wreck, and his wife compelled to leave her home and go out into the world to wrest from it a living?

An hour later, Ruth knelt by her open window, gazing out into the night. It was only a year—less than a year—ago that John was hurt, yet it seemed ages. Then she was a happy, care-free girl; now she was a woman, weighed down with respon-

sibility, with her way to make in the world. She thought of the child who had died, and was glad of its death. It was free from the problems, the relentless circumstances that were crushing her.

The village of Harbury lay white and peaceful in the moonlight. All her life Ruth had lived in this little village, and she loved it. Her father and mother had died when she was but a small child. and an aunt had taken her to bring up. She had been good to Ruth, and shielded her from every So the girl's life had been like a calmly flowing river. Even her love for John had not disturbed its placidity. Their friendship had ripened so easily and naturally into love that she had experienced none of the heartaches, the jealousies that come to other women in this most happy period of their lives. John had had no rival, nor had she. For once the course of true love had run smooth. When John had become established in business. they were married. Ruth was only nineteen at the time.

Looking out into the star-strewn sky, she wondered if her life would ever run smoothly again. It seemed to her as if the river had now flowed out into the sea to be exposed to the tempest and tumult of the elements. She was to leave John, to fare forth into an unknown land. And yet the thought of leaving him came as a relief. It was

far less hard to be parted from him altogether than to see him day after day, a caricature of his former self. Still there was the depression of broken ties, the sadness of ending the old life.

But Ruth was young, and to the young hope is easy. As she turned her thoughts to the future, her spirits revived, and she was almost happy as she speculated about her life in New York. She had never been there, and all that she knew about it was what she had derived from books, and yet she thought of it with a kind of love. It was New York, the city of opportunity, as entrancing and romantic as a fairy city. Who could tell what gift it had in store for her?

She imagined herself taking her place in the industrial life. She might begin in the offices of some great law firm, or possibly in one of the great banking houses of Wall Street, or maybe in a store—although that she would not like so well. But, at any rate, she would be one of the cogs in the great commercial machine that made it the foremost city in the world. She would be a New Yorker. The thought gave her a feeling of satisfaction.

She meant to work hard; she realized that work was the basis of success. She was not going to the city like a foolish, silly girl, dreaming of the lights, the crowds, the good times. She was going

soberly, in earnest. She would strive her utmost, and she felt that her efforts would be rewarded. Life must give up its best to those who try hardest; otherwise, it would be but a hollow mockery.

And then she prayed, flinging her hopes, her fears, her desires out into the void, trustful that she would be answered in due season.

When she arose from her knees, the first streaks of daylight were beginning to tint the sky in the east.

CHAPTER VI

THE train for New York was pulling out of Boston. In the car in which Ruth was seated there were few passengers. Across the aisle from her was a floridly well-dressed man, who looked as though he might be a commercial traveler. He had already made several attempts to attract her attention, and Ruth was very indignant, very embarrassed, and a little frightened. In Harbury such a procedure was unknown, and now that she was traveling alone and among strangers it disconcerted her.

She had left Harbury early that morning. The parting from John's mother had been extremely painful to the girl. The old lady broke down completely and implored Ruth to give up the venture. She had had, she said, a dream which boded ill for the girl. Just what the dream portended she did not know, but she was sure that some great evil lurked in the future.

And, if the parting from John's mother had been hard, the parting from John was doubly so. At the very last Ruth threw herself on his breast, and concentrated the whole power of her love in an

attempt to awaken his recognition. It was vain. Once the shadow of some emotion flitted across his face, and she thought that she was about to succeed, but it passed, leaving the features as vacant and meaningless as before.

But all that was over now, and she felt a curious lightness of heart. She was already embarked on the new life; every minute was sweeping her nearer New York, the land of promise. And, when her thoughts did stray back to Harbury, she recalled them, and sent them out into the future to speculate on the success that was to be hers.

Behind her were a party of theatrical people; this much Ruth gleaned from their conversation, to which she gradually found herself listening. They assailed each other with light-hearted banter, and one girl especially seemed to be the object of attack; but she was so quick, so invariably apt in her retorts, that her assailant was always left an object of hilarious commiseration, and acknowledged himself or herself—as the case might be—defeated, with entire good humor.

Ruth could not understand all their talk, being neither acquainted with things theatrical, nor conversant with metropolitan slang, but their lightheartedness appealed to and encouraged her. She felt that these people had engaged in the battle of life, and, if they did carry scars, they hid them

admirably under a happy exterior. She felt impelled to turn around and see what, these merry people looked like. She waited for some moments, debating how best to accomplish this observation without her action seeming too apparent. At last, just as the whole party were roaring with laughter over a particularly witty sally of the girl's, she turned.

By some process of telepathy, the girl glanced up at the same instant, and Ruth found herself gazing directly into the eyes of a young woman of about her own age. She was dressed in a rather conspicuous black-and-white costume, and her hat was just a shade larger than the very large hats which Dame Fashion had decreed were the proper thing that season. The face was attractive, with an impudent, piquant beauty, and the clear, friendly, gray eyes gave an impression of frank good humor. Before Ruth could recover herself, and shift her gaze, a friendly smile lighted up the girl's face, and she nodded brightly. Ruth returned the smile, a feeling of warmth creeping into her heart.

As Ruth turned back, the smile still on her face, her glance happened to meet that of the man across the aisle, whom she had completely forgotten. To her dismay, he bowed and raised his hat. She turned to the window, biting her lip in vexation.

The man rose and strolled leisurely to the front of the car, ostensibly to get a drink of water. As he turned to come back, the conviction leaped into Ruth's mind that he meant to take the seat beside her; she was as sure of it as if he had already done so. A sudden panic seized her. She cast a wild look around for a way of escape. Then she thought of the girl who had smiled at her. She threw an appealing glance over her shoulder. The girl was not looking at her, but at the man, yet suddenly she rose, and sauntered deliberately forward, dropping into the seat beside Ruth with easy grace. As she did so, she glanced up at the man with humorous impudence.

The man frowned, and resumed his former seat. Ruth turned to the girl with a quick smile of gratitude. "Oh, thank you!" she breathed. "I did not know what to do."

"I guess you're not wise to those Johnnies," returned the other in an amused tone.

"No," answered Ruth truthfully.

"If you were on the stage, you would soon get used to that sort of thing. Sometimes, when you come out of the theater, you find 'em standing in bunches. And they're always sending you notes and flowers, and begging you to meet them after the show, and all that kind of rot. Sometimes they get so strenuous that it gets tiresome. When I

was playing the Western circuit, there was an old duck who used to follow me around from one place to another. I got sick of it, so one night I made myself up to look about forty-nine and a half, and put on a dress that made me look as if I had a shape like a drink of water. Then I went out and met him—I had written I would. You ought to have seen his face when he saw me. He was game, and stuck, but I'll bet he had the worst evening he ever had in his life, and I stuck him for champagne, and ordered the most expensive things I could find on the bill of fare."

She laughed merrily at the recollection, and Ruth smiled, although it did not seem quite right to her for a girl to meet a strange man, nor could she approve of drinking champagne.

"By the way," the girl went on, "my name's Lory Williams. I hold down a soubrette part in 'The Rajah of Singput.' We're making the jump from Boston to Jersey City. Now," with an engaging smile, "you know all about me. Tell me who you are."

Ruth told her.

"That's better," said Lory, settling back comfortably in her seat. "Now we're acquainted. You're from the country, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered Ruth, "but I'm going to live in New York," she added, with the instinctive sensi-

tiveness which dwellers in Arcadia have about their home.

Lory turned aside a moment to annihilate one of the men of the company, who, seeing her talking to a presentable young woman, had strolled up for an introduction.

"Run away and sell your papers, little boy," she drawled. "No one asked you to butt into this game."

The man—he was a good-looking young fellow—laughed, and bestowed a humorous glance upon Ruth. He turned, and went back to his companions in the face of a storm of good-natured chaff.

Lory turned back to Ruth. "Going to New York to stay with folks, or-"

- "No," answered Ruth proudly, "I'm going there to earn my living. You see, back in Harbury where I live, there is absolutely nothing for a woman who wants to work, to do. So I am going to try New York."
- "What's your graft—I mean, what kind of work are you going to do?"
 - "Oh!—anything I can get."

An expression in which pity was blended with amusement flitted across Lory's face.

- "Know bookkeeping, stenography, typewriting—anything like that?"
 - "No-o," confessed Ruth, "I don't know any par-

ticular thing, but," she added hopefully, "I have had a good education and I think I can learn quickly."

Lory's face became serious. "Look here," she said gravely, "I don't want to discourage you, and I don't want to butt into your affairs, but for Heaven's sake, kid,"—Ruth afterwards learned that "kid" was a term of endearment,—"if you don't absolutely have to go to New York, don't do it. Go back where you came from."

"But I do have to," answered Ruth, and then, drawn out by Lory's abrupt, rather than adroit, questions, she told her all.

When she had finished, Lory's face was deeply sympathetic. "You are certainly up against tough luck." she observed.

"Why did you advise me not to go to New York?" questioned Ruth.

"Oh, it's all right to go if you have to, only of course it is rather a hard game for a stranger! Still, you may bump up against a good job first thing—you can't tell. Where are you going to stay?"

"I don't know—in a boarding-house, I suppose. Do you know of any place?"

"You don't want to board," answered Lory decidedly. "The boarding-houses you could afford are on the bum, and you'd meet a lot of cheap

skates there who would make you sick of life. There'd be an old maid without any teeth, and a Willie from behind the ribbon counter, who flashes a red tie, and plasters his hair down till it shines, and a bunch of 'has-beens' who tell you all about the money they used to have. Then there'd be the fat lady who dopes out the society reports, and every morning at the breakfast table hands you out the latest doings of the swells. It's fierce. You don't want to go to one of those joints."

Ruth laughed at the other's description. "What shall I do then?"

- "Why, get a furnished room for light house-keeping."
 - "What do you mean by light housekeeping?"
- "Light-housekeeping rooms are the ones where they let you cook your grub. Some of them have a little gas stove in them, others an oil stove. They're pretty rotten, to tell the truth, but they're better than a boarding-house."
 - "How do you know where to find them?"
- "Look in the paper. There's always a bunch of them advertised. You want to strike out for something on the East Side—West Side's too expensive. Somewhere along in the eighties ought to be all right."

Ruth thanked her, and wrote down the desirable location in a little notebook.

"By the way," remarked Lory, "if you're going to beat up a job, you want to get that wedding ring out of sight, and forget you're a Mrs. Employers don't hire married women, if they know it."

"I thought lots of married women worked," said Ruth, surprised.

"So they do, but in most cases they go under the name of Miss. You see, employers are wise that married women are more independent than single ones, and, if they're not treated right, they'll do a quick hike. Hope you're not superstitious about the ring, I mean."

Ruth disclaimed superstition, but the thought of taking off the ring caused her a pang. It would seem like the breaking of one more bond connecting her with John.

"Do you think I will have much trouble in finding something to do?" Ruth asked her companion.

"Can't tell anything about it. Sometimes you don't have any trouble at all, but you don't want to get discouraged if you don't get anything the first week. And, remember this, when the employer asks you if you have had experience, tell him yes. No matter what the job is, tell him you know how to do it, and that you have been in that line for five years. If he asks you if you can build an automobile, tell him it's the easiest thing you

know; your mother taught you when you were a kid."

- "But that would not be honest," protested Ruth.
- "Honest!" exclaimed Lory in disgust. "Who cares? What you're after is a job."

Ruth said nothing more about it, but she determined that this much of Lory's advice she would not take. She could never hope to succeed, she thought, if she started by telling an untruth.

"Why don't you try for the stage?" demanded Lory abruptly. "You are pretty, and you have a good shape."

Ruth blushed, and shrank back a little. "Oh, I couldn't do that!" In Harbury the theatrical profession was not looked upon as desirable or even respectable. Then Ruth remembered that her companion was an actress.

- "Oh, excuse me!" she cried. "I didn't
- "That's all right, kid; I'm not stuck on it my-self," she laughed easily.

By the time the train reached New York, a sincere friendship had sprung up between the two girls, as is so often the case where two people of opposite types meet. Lory had given Ruth a great many points in regard to her coming life in the city. She impressed upon her that she must not take any commission positions, where she was called upon

to buy anything, nor should she pay any attention to the advertisements of "work for ladies to do at home."

"You go there, and meet a smooth, oily guy, who tells you how you can make all kinds of money, if you'll only buy an outfit to do the work with. If you're an easy mark, you pony up a few bucks, and go home and work your head off making something that you couldn't even give away to save your soul. And another thing—don't let any fresh guys speak to you, and don't accept any invitations out to dinner or lunch. You'll probably run up against some employers who will ask you to go with them, so they can talk things over. Don't do it, not even if he looks like a saint on a church window."

Ruth promised to remember this advice.

"Now, kid," Lory said affectionately at parting, "write me as soon as you're settled, and as soon as the show breaks up, which will be in a month or so, I'll look you up. If anything should happen in the meantime that you should go broke, let me know, and maybe I can raise a few bucks somewhere for you. That's the way I do when I'm broke; I write to everybody I know, and bone them for money. I generally get enough answers to keep me going for a little while."

"You are very kind," said Ruth. "I can't tell

you how much I appreciate it—all your kindness to me. I——"

"Rats!" exclaimed Lory, turning away, plainly embarrassed. "Well, so long, kid," she flung over her shoulder cheerfully. "Be good, and don't take any wooden money."

CHAPTER VII

RUTH had no trouble in finding the hotel at which Lory had advised her to stay for the night; it was near the station, and Lory had pointed it out before leaving her. She secured a room, and went to bed happy.

So far, the world seemed a very pleasant place: she'had met with nothing but kindness. Even the hotel clerk had been overanxious, it seemed, to please her in regard to a room. He had kept her so long in describing the comparative advantages of different rooms that Ruth at last had to tell him that she was very tired, and wished to become settled as quickly as possible. Ruth was too unsophisticated to dream that his courtesy arose from the fact that she was pretty. Before the accident to John, she had taken pleasure in her good looks, and, womanlike, had done all she could—in the way of dress to enhance her beauty. But, since the great trouble had come into her life, her personal appearance was a matter of indifference to her. She still dressed becomingly, but it was purely from force of habit, and not from any thought she gave as to how she looked.

She was physically tired from the unaccustomed traveling, but her conversation with Lory had refreshed her mentally, so she quickly went to sleep almost as soon as her head rested on the somewhat hard pillow.

When she awoke next morning, the city was well on its way into its day's activity. The thousand noises of its varied energy were blended into one mighty hum, which was borne through the open window to Ruth's ear with a pleasant significance. She listened drowsily for a while to the clanging of the cars, the honking of automobile horns, the roar of the distant elevated. The quick rap-tap of horses' hoofs on the asphalt furnished a high staccato to the rumbling bass of the trucks. This was the life in which she would soon take her place. This was New York, the city of her dreams, and opportunity was even now knocking at her door.

She reproached herself a little that she was not homesick, but Harbury and John and his mother seemed very far away, very indistinct and dreamlike. It seemed years since the train had drawn away from the little station, and she had watched the tiny building grow tinier in the distance, until it finally faded from sight. The past seemed vague. Only the present was real, the present—and the future.

She rose and dressed leisurely, talking to herself the while.

"The first thing to do is to find a room. Right after breakfast, I will begin to look for one. If possible, I must get all settled to-day, so that, bright and early to-morrow morning, I can start out to look for a position."

A slight depression threatened her as she thought of the ordeal of looking for a position; New York seemed so big; she would hardly know where to begin. She reassured herself, however, by remembering that the advertisements in the papers would tell her just what employers might be in need of her services.

"I know I will succeed," she told herself hopefully. "John always said I was very smart about business. I am young and strong, and I have had a good education. There must be lots of girls who have positions who have not had any of my advantages. I know I shall succeed."

With which comforting reflection she finished dressing, and went downstairs. She bought a paper at the news stand, and, passing out of the hotel, turned west along Forty-second Street, toward a restaurant which Lory had recommended as being cheap in price, and excellent as to the quality of the food served. She wondered vaguely why all the people were hurrying so. For an instant it

occurred to her that there must be a fire or an accident down the street, but this did not seem plausible, as there were just as many people hurrying in the opposite direction. As she passed the station where she had arrived the night before, an incoming train had discharged its load of commuters, and they came rushing out through the doors as if in frenzied flight. Ruth was caught in the vortex, and for a moment she was almost carried off her feet; she could make no headway in any direction. But, at last, she was caught in a swirl of the current that carried her out of the whirlpool, and, somewhat flushed and breathless, she continued on her way.

She reached the restaurant, and for a moment hesitated about entering. Glancing through the huge, plate-glass windows, she saw an immense room stretching away as far as the eye could see; she found afterwards that this illusion of length was caused by the simple device of having the entire rear wall composed of mirrors. The walls and floor were of white tile, and tables seemingly of mahogany. White-aproned waitresses hurried to and fro with incredible deftness. Ruth feared she had made a mistake, and that this was one of the places catering only to the very rich. But a second reading of the name displayed on the win-

dow assured her that it was the restaurant Lory had mentioned, and she went in.

While she was waiting for her order, she opened the paper to see if there were any rooms advertised within the limits of the territory prescribed by Lory. There were—any number of them. She felt that she would have no trouble in securing a room. When the waitress brought the eggs and toast which Ruth had ordered, Ruth smiled and thanked her.

The woman looked surprised. "I guess you ain't a New Yorker," she observed.

"Why do you say that?" asked Ruth, surprised in her turn.

"New Yorkers ain't got time to be polite," the waitress flung back over her shoulder, as she hurried off after another order.

Ruth looked around the restaurant, and came to the conclusion that, at least, they seemed to have no time to waste in eating. Everyone was rushing through the meal at top speed. She wondered if she would ever become imbued with the spirit of haste, as these people were.

The room which Ruth had decided to look at first was on Eightieth Street. Lory had told her that to reach this section she should take an uptown Madison Avenue car. But, when Ruth came to follow these directions, she was confronted by a

problem which had not occurred to her before, she did not know in what direction uptown lay. She debated the question in her mind for some moments, but could not solve it, so she approached a policeman and asked him.

"Will you please tell me how I can reach Eightieth Street?"

"Take the up car," he answered shortly, without looking at her.

"Which way is up?"

He glanced around at her angrily. A thirst for knowledge may be admired by some people, but they are not members of the New York police force. A block in the traffic claimed his attention at that moment, and he strode off without answering her.

She turned away, not daring to follow and risk his displeasure by a repetition of her question. Suddenly she felt very helpless, very much alone. She seemed the veriest atom in all this mass of humanity. She looked around at the hurrying crowds, and wondered how she was to gain the necessary information. She felt a touch on her arm.

"Ain't lost, are you?" said a man's voice.

She turned around, and recognized the speaker as a man whom she had noticed lounging in the doorway of a cigar store. She shrank back.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of me!" the man went on, noticing her expression. "I ain't one of

these here mashers. I saw you ask the cop something, and he didn't seem overanxious to tell you. Them cops is the limit. If you want to know how to get anywheres, I can tell you."

Ruth took a second look at the man. Although he was dressed in a flashy manner, there was something in his face that reassured her.

"I want to go to East Eightieth Street," she said frankly.

"Why, any of these cars will take you there. Here's one now."

He helped Ruth on the car, and, raising his hat, sauntered back to the curb, probably entirely ignorant of how—out of all proportion—his kindness had rallied a faltering courage.

Ruth entered the car with a lighter heart, and, finding a vacant seat near the door, interested herself in studying the other passengers. She was surprised that not one seemed to be an American. It seemed as if all the other nationalities of earth were represented—even to China—but America seemed to lack representation. It was her first glimpse of the cosmopolitan aspect of the New York population.

She had no trouble in finding the street, as the number was plainly displayed on the gas-lamp at the corner. She alighted from the car, and turned eastward. The house she was seeking was in the

middle of the block. The first floor was occupied by a tobacco store, and there were a number of dirty, half-clad children playing about the door. She hesitated a moment, and then ascended the steps and rang the bell. Her ring was answered, after considerable delay, by a woman clad untidily in a soiled wrapper. She eyed Ruth suspiciously until the girl made known her errand, and then, without a word, motioned her to follow. Ruth was conducted through a hall almost as dark as midnight, and up a staircase which, although Ruth could not see it on account of the gloom, she felt sure was very dirty.

The woman stopped in front of a door and, unlocking it, threw it open. The room was indescribably cheerless, and the atmosphere was laden with a disagreeable, musty smell. The furniture consisted of a bed, two chairs with broken cane bottoms, a bureau whose glass was cracked, and a washstand on which were a pitcher and bowl, both also cracked. At one end of the room was a table, on which was a tiny oil-stove.

"I'm afraid this will not do," said Ruth timidly.
"It is not just what I want."

The woman nodded unconcernedly, and stood aside for Ruth to pass out. Then she locked the door, and disappeared down the hall, leaving Ruth to find her way out as best she could. In all the

while she had been with her, the woman had not spoken a word. Ruth wondered that she was not more anxious to rent the room. She did not know that, for even the dingiest room in that locality, the demand far exceeds the supply, and the owner can, therefore, afford to be independent.

Ruth was glad to reach the street. She turned hopefully toward the next place on her list. This was two blocks further up, and it took her only a few minutes to walk the distance. Her experience there was just as unsatisfactory, although the landlady was more voluble, and told Ruth the history of all her roomers, and also explained how it was that she, "a gentlewoman by birth and eddication," should be reduced to taking in roomers. The room itself was just as dirty, the furniture was just as dingy, yet there was this difference: it was whole, while it was the window that was cracked.

Ruth began to feel a little discouraged, and, as the day wore on and she met with no better success, she began to wonder if there was a decent room in the city to be had for the price which she could afford to pay. Toward evening, in a fit of desperation, she decided that the next place on her list should be her home for the time being, anyway. And the gamble brought her a fair return, for the room was cleaner than the rest she had looked at, and the landlady was a kindly old German woman,

who seemed to take a notion to the girl, and tried to make her comfortable, even to the proffering of a glass of beer, which beverage, she explained, was excellent on a hot day. Ruth declined this hospitality, although she thanked the woman heartily for the offer.

When Ruth had succeeded, after some difficulty, in having her trunk brought up from the station, she started in housecleaning, and with the aid of a few pictures and knick-knacks, which she had brought from Harbury, managed to give the room a very homelike appearance.

The landlady—her name was Mrs. Vogel—hovered around watching Ruth's energy with appreciation, and helping every now and then in a vague, haphazard manner.

"You work very hard for one who so little is," she commended.

Ruth laughed. "I'm used to it," she replied.

"You are from the country, yes?"

Ruth nodded. She placed a photograph of John on the bureau, and moved it from side to side, to ascertain where it would look the best.

"That is your sweetheart?"

" My husband."

The woman came over and examined the photograph critically. "He is a goot man. The face, it is goot. I know. He is a goot man."

"Yes," Ruth answered. "He is a very good man."

"Why do you come to New York alone?" was the woman's next question.

Ruth could not resent this catechising; it was so evidently well meant.

"My husband is sick," she answered. "I have come to the city to look for work."

The woman's face showed sympathy. "That is too bad. It is hard looking for work. And you are so little."

Before Ruth went to bed, she sat down and wrote a letter to John's mother, and also one to Lory. Both letters were cheerful. Ruth had decided that, on the whole, her first day in New York had been a success.

CHAPTER VIII

Before breakfast next morning, Ruth went out and bought a paper. She spread it out on the table before her and, with rapidly beating heart, opened it. Somewhere in those prosaic pages might lie the clew that would lead her on to success. She ran her eye hastily through the "help wanted" columns, and her heart sank, for the word "experienced" prefaced nearly every advertisement. Moreover, there were many which requested the applicant to write, stating wages, and giving references. Ruth did not know what wages to ask for, nor could she, of course, give references.

At last, however, she discovered a few among the many that did not ask anything except that the applicant call. One of these, advertising a position in a doctor's office, she decided to answer first. It was early yet, and she prepared and ate her breakfast leisurely. Then she set out to walk to the physician's office.

Her way took her across Central Park—she had been given directions by the landlady—and the sight of its well-kept lawns, the songs of the birds, the pleasant green of the foliage recalled Harbury to her mind. She was seized with a sudden rush of homesickness; for a moment it seemed as if she must fly back to her home regardless of consequences. She fought off this feeling, however, and tried to think only of the beauty of the morning. She interested herself in watching the people, and wondering what they all did for a living. A squirrel ran down the trunk of a tree beside the path, and sat up on its haunches inspecting her critically. "Oh, you beauty!" she cried, and tried to coax him nearer. The squirrel waited a moment to see if any peanuts were to be forthcoming, and then, deciding to the contrary, disappeared with an indignant flirt of his tail. Ruth laughed, and went on.

Coming out of the park, she crossed Eighth Avenue, and continued up that thoroughfare for a few blocks, then turned toward the west. At last she came to the office. It was a brownstone house, looking singularly unattractive on the outside, as indeed most of the houses in New York did, Ruth thought.

A woman in the uniform of a trained nurse opened the door.

"I came in answer to your advertisement," said Ruth.

The woman looked at her a moment doubtfully, then said:

"If you will step into the reception-room, and

wait for a few moments until I am at liberty, I will tell what it is the doctor wishes."

The room into which Ruth was ushered made her fairly hold her breath. She had thought the Bradbury mansion magnificent—but this! She decided the physician must be very rich, and would therefore pay high wages. Naturally every thought led back to the subject which was engrossing her mind. After a few moments the nurse came in.

"The doctor," she said impressively, "wishes a young woman to open the door, and post the books. I will show you about the books, in case you take the position. In addition to this work, the office has to be dusted every morning—the doctor has a colored man who does the sweeping and heavy work—and there are sometimes other things to be done which are out of the ordinary run. The doctor wishes a young woman who is willing and energetic, and he is also very particular that she be well, or at least, neatly dressed. I think," she went on, with a friendly smile, "that you would suit him. You live at home, I suppose?"

"No," answered Ruth. "I am alone in the city."
The nurse hesitated. "The doctor prefers a young woman who lives at home with her parents.
You see," she explained, "the doctor has to be very particular. His practice is among the wealthi-

est and most refined people. If he should engage a

young woman who was not "—she hesitated for a word—"just right, it would create a bad impression. But I will speak to him, and maybe he will make an exception in your case."

The nurse rose, and left the room.

While the woman had been speaking, Ruth flushed painfully. Yet she recognized that the physician probably did have to be careful as to whom he engaged, and she felt that, as this was the case, the pay—should she obtain the position—would be correspondingly high.

The nurse returned after a short while, accompanied by a man apparently of middle age. He was dressed in a suit of some rough, mixed material, and did not look at all like a physician, Ruth thought. He frowned absent-mindedly, and after one sharp glance at the girl nodded to the nurse, and, turning on his heel, left the room.

The nurse came over to Ruth. "The doctor," she announced grandly, "has decided to make an exception in your favor. When can you begin work?"

"Right away," answered Ruth, hardly able to control the joy that was surging in her heart.

The nurse smiled her approval. "The doctor will be pleased," she commented. "He likes to have people about him who are anxious to work. So many young women nowadays seem to think that it

is horrible to have to work. But I can see that you are not that kind. By the way, have you a black dress?"

Ruth thought a moment. "I have one, but it is rather shabby."

"You will have to get one, then. The doctor always insists that his office girl dress in black. Of course, for the first few days, it will not matter, but after that—you'll attend to it, won't you?"

Ruth promised, although the buying of a dress would make quite a hole in her available capital. She decided, however, that the expenditure would be justified, now that she had obtained a good position.

The nurse rose. "If you'll come with me, I will show you what there is to be done."

At ten o'clock, the patients began to pour in, and they came in droves, until all the chairs in the reception-room were occupied, and some of the later-comers had to stand. There was always a brougham or a motor-car either arriving or passing on. Ruth was awed by the magnificence of the gowns which the women wore—practically all of the patients were women—and wondered how these people could afford to wear such dresses, just to come to the doctor's, when in Harbury such gowns, if they had been owned at all, would be carefully treasured up for special occasions.

By noon Ruth was feeling rather tired, and very hungry. She wondered at what time the nurse would tell her to go out to luncheon, but as the minutes went by, and the patients still kept coming in, she began to doubt whether she would be allowed to go out to lunch at all.

But at two o'clock the nurse appeared at the door of the reception-room, and announced that the doctor would see no more patients that day. Ruth was astonished, for some of them had been waiting for over an hour. She was surprised also that they made no protest, but arose and went out without a word. The nurse, who was standing by, noticed her amazement, and laughed.

"Oh, they like that!" she said. "It makes them feel that the doctor is a very great man—as indeed he is—to be able to be so independent. You see, all these people are very rich, and they are so accustomed to having everyone bow down to them that, when they do find a man like the doctor who plays the master, they conceive a great respect for him. You should hear how he talks to them. Just so long as they do as he tells them to, he treats them with the greatest kindness, but once let them disobey, or try to tell him what they think about their symptoms, and he puts them down in short order. And they like him the better for it. They are all the more sure to come again."

Ruth nodded. "I can understand how they would feel that way."

The nurse was moved to other disclosures, while Ruth was straightening up the reception-room. "You noticed that old woman who came in this morning —the one in the cerise gown? Well, there is nothing whatever the matter with her, but she comes here nearly every day. If the doctor wants to see her, he does; if not, he tells her to go home. He has prescribed bread pills for her with directions that she is to take one three times a day after drinking a glass of water. Once she took one, and drank the water afterwards. She told him she did not think it made any difference. You should have seen the look on his face. 'Madam.' he said. 'leave my office and do not come back until you are ready to obey my orders.' She went away in a huff, but she came back the next day, and begged him to take up her case again. She must pay him at least ten thousand dollars a year."

"But," protested Ruth, "if there is nothing the matter with her—"

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. "That is her affair. Besides, even if the doctor did tell her, she would refuse to believe him, and simply go to some other physician. Anyhow, it pleases her to come here; she feels that it is a mark of wealth and social rank to be seen in this office, and in a

way it is, for the doctor always looks up the standing of a patient before he will accept the case."

From the nurse's conversation, Ruth could see that, in her universe, "The Doctor" was a deity of the first rank, but to Ruth there was something ignoble in his course. She had always thought of the medical profession as being above this kind of charlatanry. Doctor Northall, she felt sure, would have scorned such methods. Possibly-although Ruth did not think of it—that was the reason why he was merely a poor country doctor, instead of a fashionable city physician. Ruth did not dream of the full extent to which her present employer had debased his profession into solely a means of money-getting. If she had, she probably would have been very harsh in her judgment of him. Yet this opinion would not have been entirely deserved. There were extenuating circumstances.

Doctor J. Warrington Strong—his name had originally been written Joseph W. Strong—had started out in the practice of medicine with ideals. One of these was that he intended to be honest with his patients, not honest in the accepted meaning of the word, but absolutely, strictly honest. So when, shortly after he had hung out his shingle, a rich patient summoned him, he diagnosed the case as a slight cold, and, instead of calling two or three times a day, he left a prescription for a simple rem-

edy and did not call again. The patient very naturally concluded that he was not sufficiently impressed with her importance, and called in another physician, who, wiser in the ways of the world and with a deeper insight into human nature, clapped her into bed and ordered two trained nurses in attendance. Then, after frightening her nearly to death, he cured her in a really miraculous manner—so she told her friends. She paid the five-hundred-dollar fee of this worthy man with far more willingness than she did the modest bill for two dollars which Joseph Strong presented, and her estimate of the comparative ability of the two men was, to say the least, prejudiced.

In his pursuit of honesty, the young physician found that it carried with it an inevitable accompaniment of poverty. This he could have stood, for he had no particular love of wealth, but to forego the good opinion and admiration of his fellow-men, and particularly of his professional brethren, was different. And he found that, unless a physician were well off in the world's goods, he was looked upon as a failure, a man of little ability. Even the patients for whom he did his best would leave him to go to a man of more reputation.

For awhile Joseph Strong struggled along in bitterness of spirit, and, when he did change his course, he did so completely, for he was not the man to do things by halves. He made a solemn resolution that he would leave no stone unturned to reach the heights of medical pre-eminence in New York. He accomplished his aim; the city held on its medical rolls no name that was more honored, envied, and applauded than that of J. Warrington Strong.

After Ruth had returned from luncheon, which she obtained in a little restaurant on Ninth Avenue, she was set to work posting the books. This proved to be a much more complicated process than the nurse had led her to believe. Under each patient's name was a list of questions, the answers of which had to be filled in. The doctor dictated these answers, and he was very impatient when Ruth could not spell the complicated words he used. She noticed that in many cases he gave the same Latin name in answer to the question as to what disease the patient had. Ruth later asked the nurse what was the disease that seemed to be so common.

"Oh, that is just a little joke of the doctor's," the nurse replied, smiling. "It is the Latin word for nothing. You see, most of them think they are sick, when in reality there is nothing whatever the matter with them."

After the books were posted, Ruth was asked to sweep the office, as the colored man, whose duty it was to perform this task, did not appear. Al-

though she was very tired, Ruth consented willingly, and it was after seven o'clock when she hurried home, worn out in body, but very happy. She had gained a position on her second day in New York. She could hardly believe her good luck.

She was so exultant that she felt as if she must tell some one of her good fortune, so she hunted up the landlady, and poured forth the tale of her triumph, what a splendid position she had found, how rich the doctor was, what a large practice he had, how beautiful his office was, and how kind the nurse had been to her.

Mrs. Vogel listened with a broad smile of pleasure on her kindly face.

"That is goot," she said, when Ruth had finished. "How much do you get?"

"I don't know," answered Ruth, "but I know it will be a good deal, because he is very particular. The nurse asked me any number of questions before I could get the position."

The woman's face became sober. "You make him tell you what he gives you already," she advised.

Ruth laughed at her suspicions, and sat down to write the good news to Harbury.

Once more she went to bed happy; her second day in New York had been a huge success.

CHAPTER IX

It was eight o'clock the next morning when Ruth reached the office. She did not see either the doctor or the nurse, but there was an old colored man pottering about, who showed her what she was expected to do. Ruth plunged eagerly into her work, and, although she found that her duties consisted in doing much more than the dusting of which the nurse had spoken, she did not mind. She already took an interest in her position, and she endeavored to make the office look spotlessly clean and neat. She felt that she was a part of the establishment, and looked forward with interest to the time when the patients would begin to arrive. Although the fact of the doctor's dishonesty—she could call it by no less a term-weighed upon her mind, she had decided that it was not for her to judge, knowing nothing of the demands of a city practice, and, anyway, if these people thought they were sick, and derived comfort from the doctor's ministration, he was at least doing something for their well-being.

At nine o'clock the nurse came in, and smiled her approval on finding how Ruth had progressed with the work.

"The doctor will be pleased," she said. "He likes to see one take an interest in one's work."

Ruth remembered that she had intended asking about the wages, but she hesitated. It seemed in a way ungrateful, especially when the doctor had made an exception in her case; it seemed to denote a lack of appreciation. Still, she decided, she had better ask.

"How much does the doctor pay for the work I am doing?"

The nurse was arranging her hair. "Five dollars a week," she answered without turning around.

Ruth sat down abruptly in a chair.

"Five dollars!" she exclaimed.

The nurse looked around. "Why, yes," she said in surprise. "I thought you knew—that is the usual pay for work such as you are doing."

"But," stammered Ruth, "that is hardly anything; I couldn't live on that."

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. "That is hardly the doctor's affair," she returned calmly. "He can get any number of girls who are willing to work for that amount, and glad of the chance."

Ruth's anger rose. "It is an outrage," she said, holding herself in check, and speaking quietly, although her voice vibrated with indignation. "He knows that I am living alone in the city—I told you that. He knows that it is impossible for any-

one to live on five dollars a week. I should think he would be ashamed to offer anybody such a miserable amount, but when he knows that I have to be self-supporting——"

The nurse's face froze. "I think you had better go, Miss Lawson," she said icily. "I am sorry there has been a misunderstanding, but, if you did not know enough to ask the amount of your wages, you can hardly blame the doctor for the mistake, nor can you expect him to investigate the means of every applicant for a position. For all he knew, you might have an income from some other source."

Ruth's anger died down. "I suppose it was my fault," she admitted. "Yet I never dreamed that a physician with a practice such as his, and with such an office, would pay so little."

The nurse's face softened. "You are evidently strange to the city, or you would not be surprised," she remarked.

Ruth put on her hat. Then she thought of something. She turned to the nurse, but at that moment the doctor entered the room.

"I am leaving," she said, in answer to his questioning glance, "I did not understand about the amount of wages I was to receive. I am sorry if I have put you to any trouble."

"What is the matter with the wages?" he asked brusquely.

"It is not enough for me to live on," Ruth answered simply. "I am alone in the city, and I must support myself."

He grunted, and turned to his desk.

Ruth waited a moment, then said timidly: "If you will pay me for the work I did yesterday, I will go. I must hurry and look up something else."

He frowned. "It is customary to pay by the week, not by the day," he answered shortly.

"But I have been here only the one day," said Ruth, not understanding him.

"Oh, well! I don't have to pay you anything, as a matter of fact. You engaged to work by the week, and you have broken your contract, but I'll pay you. Here, nurse, figure out how much I owe this young woman. She wasn't here a whole day yesterday, didn't get here till after nine." The nurse blushed at the exposed penuriousness of her idol, but took up a pad and began to figure.

Ruth's eyes flashed. "Pardon me," she said decidedly, "I have been here an hour this morning. I think that makes up the full day."

The doctor looked up, frowning. "You will take just what I choose to give you, or nothing at all," he said coolly.

Ruth saw that she was beaten. She took the money, and walked out, carrying herself proudly

erect. So this was the man who was so particular whom he engaged to work for him, whom it was so hard to please, who "liked to see one take an interest in one's work"—this man who was paid ten thousand dollars a year by one patient, and paid those who labored for him so poorly. What a fool she had been to be taken in by the nurse's twaddle about the "great man." Ruth wondered if there could be others like him. The old German woman had been suspicious that he might be like that. Ruth was, therefore, forced to the conclusion that there were.

When she reached the sidewalk, the full force of the unfortunate outcome was borne in upon her. The problem which she had thought solved, now confronted her in a more complicated form; before, the solution had meant simply the gaining of a position; now, she saw that some positions paid so poorly that they were useless. She tried not to be discouraged. She told herself that one failure did not mean continued failure; that, if she were to be discouraged so easily, she could never hope to succeed. Yet it was a severe blow, and her air castles were tottering on their foundations. She thought of the enthusiastic letter she had written home, and would have given anything to be able to recall it.

She hurried home, and looked through the paper to discover the point of her next attack. She de-

cided to try for a store position; there were a number of saleswomen wanted at Ehrenstein & Co.'s.

She could not bear to tell the landlady of her failure, so she did not ask her how to get to Ehrenstein's. She had some trouble in finding it, but at last, by asking many times, she was directed to the store on Sixth Avenue.

The elevator which carried her up to the manager's office bore five other girls who, from their conversation, meant to apply for a position. This fact disconcerted Ruth. She had thought of herself as being the only applicant; or, rather, had not thought of it at all, for the novice in position seeking rarely takes into consideration the competition to be met. But, if Ruth was disconcerted because of the five girls, she was completely dismayed when she reached the manager's office. Outside the door were from seventy-five to a hundred girls waiting to be interviewed.

Many of these were well dressed, and carried themselves with jaunty indifference, but some were miserably clad, and their white, pinched faces struck terror to Ruth's heart. She stood there not knowing what to do, nor seeing the slightest use in doing it if she had known.

A girl standing next to her dressed in a suit which had once been black, but which time had rendered a dingy green, touched her on the arm. "Don't look like there's much show," she remarked in a hopeless tone.

Ruth shook her head.

"An' they pay high here, too. I know a girl in here that gets ten dollars a week."

"Don't they all get as much as that?" asked Ruth.

The girl turned a wondering glance on her. "Are you trying to josh me?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Oh, no!" answered Ruth hastily. "I am a stranger in the city. I do not know how much the stores pay."

"Oh!" said the girl. "Well, some girls gets ten, but the most get anywheres from eight to three and a half a week."

"Three and a half! Why, you must be mistaken. Nobody could live on that, or even on five."

"Some of them lives at home, and their folks help them out."

"But the others-"

The girl laughed harshly. "Gee, you are green! But so was I once. I was so green that, when I got my pay envelope with four dollars in it, I went up to the floor-walker and asked how he s'posed a girl was goin' to live on that. He told me a pretty girl wasn't supposed to live on her wages."

It was a moment before the girl's meaning fil-

tered into Ruth's mind. Then a hot flush spread over her face.

"No, no!" she protested. "He didn't say that. He couldn't say a thing like that!"

The girl laughed cynically. "Why, that ain't anything. Everybody knows that no girl can live in New York on the wages the stores pay; it ain't possible, and the men that run the stores counts on either a girl's family making up the difference or else she's supposed to get it out of some man. But wait till you hear the rest of what I was telling you about.

"I went up to see the man that run the store, I was so mad. I sort of doped it out that he was on the square—I'd read in the papers about his being a Sunday-school superintendent—and I was green enough to think that maybe he didn't know how much girls in his store was paid, and that they couldn't live on no such sum. Then I was going to have that floor-walker fired for insultin' me. Oh, I was the real greeny, all right! Of course they wouldn't let me in his office, but I hung around till he came out, and then I went up and blabbed the whole thing. What do you think he said?"

"I don't know," answered Ruth helplessly.

"He asked me if I would get out quietly, or would he call the store detective to put me out. I got out all right, but I had the satisfaction of tell-

ing him what I thought of him. Still I don't suppose it was his fault. He couldn't pay any higher than all the rest. If he did, the other stores would sell things cheaper than he could, and he'd have to go out of business."

Ruth did not answer. The very air seemed to All her most sacred feelings about womanhood were outraged by the girl's disclosure. Was it possible that employers would pay less than the cost of the poorest living, and expect that the girls would make up the deficit by offering up their bodies? Was it possible that they thus used prostitution as a business asset, deliberately figuring that, because of it, their employees would not be taken from them by starvation, thus forcing them to raise wages in order to keep their full complement of help? And if, as the girl had said, the individual employer was powerless to right the matter, where did the responsibility lie? She wondered if the people, the good people, of the country knew of these conditions, and yet were unwilling to take steps to change them. She did not know whether they could be changed, but, if not, what a blot on the boasted civilization of a mighty nation! What a mockery the pre-eminence of its commercial system! The girl had said that many of the employees lived at home, but, even so, was it fair that the stores should take them from their families, and

demand their labor for six days out of every week, and then expect their families to pay part of their wages? And, anyway, there must be many families who were unable to do this; there must be many who were not only unable, but even needed part of a girl's salary to keep the home going.

Ruth was glad when a man announced that the vacancies had been filled, so that she could escape into the outer air. As she went out into the street, the roar of the city greeted her ears, but in it now was no note of soothing. It sounded to her like the blood-lust cry of a wild beast.

CHAPTER X

RUTH fought a fierce battle all that day and all night against complete discouragement, and came out of it with one determination: no matter how she felt, no matter how hopeless the case might seem, she would answer every advertisement that promised the slightest chance. She would bring all the force of her will to bear to make her body do its duty, and no sickness of heart would prevent. She felt sure that there must be some well-paid positions, and one of these she must get. And to this resolution she held for a month.

Day after day she tramped the streets from morning till night, receiving rebuff after rebuff. At first she did not take Lory's advice—to lie about her lack of experience—but her honesty brought her no success, nor did her falsehood, when she at last came to it, for she had not the hardihood to make good the lie, and a few questions left her a confessed culprit. At times she acted on the advice of a well-known millionaire, and offered to work for nothing until she could prove herself of use. This offer was met, for the most part, with amusement. One employer, however, told her roughly that he

wasn't running any damned kindergarten. She had besieged the intelligence offices in search of a domestic position, but her lack of references, coupled with a certain unservant-like bearing, made employers look at her askance. It is a common belief that domestic positions are easy to obtain. People wonder why the woman failure in other lines ever need go hungry with such an opportunity ever open to her. The recently arrived referenceless Irish girl, the Pole, the Swede, the buxom German—indeed, there are positions for them, but for the American girl, if she appears above the servant type, especially if she is pretty, and can furnish no references either written or personal, there is not one.

There were days when the anticipation of failure would make Ruth turn away from the door of the business house which she had intended to enter, and only by calling up every ounce of her will-power could she force herself to undergo the torture of another refusal.

A furtive, hang-dog look grew in her face, and she shrank from her fellow-beings. At times she hated them, hated the laughing, happy people she passed in the street, and most of all the rich who rode in their carriages and automobiles, not with any well-defined hatred, but with the dull, unreasoning brute instinct which a hungry dog must feel in seeing another with a bone.

She grew intensely sensitive. She fancied that she was the object of every laugh she heard. A man or a woman's jostling against her in the street would bring the tears to her eyes. Discouragement filled her heart, to the exclusion of all other emotions. At first there had been times when hope fought its way valiantly up in her mind, but as the days went by, and it had nothing to feed on, it withered and died. She felt that she was a failure, one of those who had fought a feeble fight and lost. Her days were periods of unceasing misery, and at night her pillow was wet with tears until she fell into an exhausted sleep.

And yet the one thing that weighed her down more than anything else was the thought that she was not alone in her suffering. From her contact with working-women, mostly of the store-girl class, she learned of a state of affairs which not only bore out what she had been told by the girl in Ehrenstein's store, but opened a much more vast pit of infamy and greed. At first she could not believe it, but she was forced to by the weight of evidence's proving it true. Nor was it in the stores alone, with their miserable wages, their systems of fines making these even smaller, their overtime work with little if any overtime pay, their asking an applicant, poor, hungry, ill-clad, desperate, in no position to bargain, what was the least for which she would

be willing to work, and paying her that—it was not only in these stores where commercial greed was rampant, but in every other line in which a woman could "earn a living." Earn a living! Yes, it was a living if escape from actual death by starvation is termed a living.

In the factories and sweatshops, with their ingeniously arranged piece work, where, as the workers become more expert, the pay per piece was gradually reduced; in the offices and wholesale houses, restaurants, hotels—everywhere was the same desire—to get work done for the least possible sum, with absolutely no regard for the welfare of the worker. Yes, it was infamy—hideous, degrading infamy—and its results were equally hideous and degrading.

For all this injustice, all this meagerness of wage pointed the way inexorably to one thing. There were many girls who escaped the common fate, whose characters were strong enough to resist the almost irresistible force of poverty and temptation. There were girls whose lives in the midst of this muck put to shame the lives of the so-called saints, but an appalling number took the beaten path. It was the common thing for a working girl to be the recipient of money from some man, money which would give her a taste of the joys of life from which she was otherwise hopelessly debarred, which

would bestow upon her those little fineries so dear to the feminine heart, fineries as much ordained by nature as is the brilliant plumage of the male bird during mating season. Every force of nature, every known variety of temptation lured her on to her almost inevitable lot.

Ruth had known in a vague way of the social problem, but this phase of it, by far the most terrible in its significance, the most appalling in its tendency to debase the race, was disclosed to her for the first time.

At last the strain proved too great for her mind and body. There came a day when she had not the strength or courage to make another effort, when she sat in her stifling room in a dazed stupor, from which even the kindly ministrations of the old German woman could not rouse her. She praved for death, as she had prayed for it daily and nightly for the past two weeks. She had come to New York to embark on the sea of life, seeing only the glistening ripples on its surface. Now she knew of the rank ooze that lurked far beneath, in which lay the shattered wrecks of lives which should have been good and pure and useful, a credit to the country which ranks foremost in the civilized world. But instead they lay hopelessly sunk in the moral slime of the Empire City.

CHAPTER XI

THE sun beat down mercilessly on the sweltering city. Not a cloud relieved the torrid blueness of the blazing sky; not a breath of wind brought a second's assuagement to the suffering inhabitants. Over on the East Side, Death stalked grimly, reaping his harvest of babies, and of the old and feeble. The ambulance gong sounded everywhere. hospitals were full to overflowing. Through every door of egress from the city, the inhabitants were fleeing. The ferries were overladen with their burden of gasping humanity, seeking the comparative cool of Long Island, or, to the westward, New Jers sey, where the crowds divided, some seeking the hills as a refuge, others the beach resorts. boats sailing from the Battery to Coney Island were iammed with a haggard mob of men and women and children, who were almost on the verge of utter prostration. This was the third day of the awful heat, and it seemed as if flesh and blood could stand no more. Eager eves scanned the western horizon for a cloud which, the papers had promised, would bring relief, and eager ears strained for the first low muttering of thunder.

In Ruth's room the temperature was over a hundred, but she did not feel the heat; her misery of mind was so great that the discomfort of her body was unnoticed. She stared at the fantastic designs of the wall paper until, at times, these resolved themselves into hideous fiends, who leered at her with devilish enjoyment of her suffering. Sometimes a grim amusement would sweep over She almost laughed to think of the air castles she had built before coming to this city. How ludicrous it must have seemed to Lory to hear her talk of having a good education and being willing to learn. Then, in a burst of anger, she would rage against Fate for having brought her to this. Why could she not have been left alone, she and John, when they were so happy? Was it really God who had brought about all this misery? She could not believe it: and yet why had He allowed it-why did He allow any of the horrible things that were always taking place? Could it be that He could find any enjoyment in this world which He had created, and had allowed to be so overfilled with suffering? No: it was impossible to conceive such a thing: she would not believe it.

And then for a time her mind wandered. She was talking to John back in Harbury. It was fall; she could feel the keen, brisk air fanning her cheek; she could see the glorious coloring of the foliage.

And there was a little boy toddling along beside them, her baby. She held the tiny hand in hers, and listened to the childish prattle. She laughed happily, and the laugh aroused her. She cast a frightened glance around at the bare little room, and knew that her happiness had been but a mirage to torture her still more. After a wild burst of despairing tears, she sank into hopeless apathy.

Then she seemed to hear footsteps in the hall without, and dimly her ears took note of a knock at the door. Then it appeared as if the door was thrown open. She seemed to see Lory, Lory clothed from head to foot in white, and carrying a scarlet parasol. With her was a man. Was it John? No, for John was tall and dark, and this man was shorter, with blue eyes and light hair. She wondered who he was, and, in the very act of wondering, knew that it was all a hallucination. She passed a hand uncertainly across her eyes.

Lory's voice startled her:

"You poor kid! What have you been doing to yourself?"

Ruth brushed her hand across her eyes again, but still the figure was there, and now it advanced and dropped down beside her, and she felt an arm thrown closely about her. Startled conviction leaped into her mind.

"Lory!" she cried weakly. "Oh, Lory, I'm so

tired! I've tried to find work, and——" Her voice trailed off into silence.

Lory turned to the man. "Jack, the kid's sick; she's fainted. You'd better get a doctor."

The man hastened away on his errand, and Lory carried the wasted form to the bed. She bathed the girl's face with cool water, and chafed her hot hands, but she could not bring her back to consciousness.

The doctor, when he came, shook his head gravely.

"She has a high fever," he said. "Has she had anything to worry her?"

"Oh, no!" answered Lory grimly. "She only butted into New York to find work when she did not know how to do a blamed thing. Regular picnic, that!"

The physician turned his eyes sadly on the fragile form on the bed. "It beats me why they do it," he remarked half to himself. "I see so many cases like this. There are thousands of them coming to New York every day. God! if some one would only warn them—tell them to keep away from New York as if it were a plague city——"

"And so it is," commented Lory bitterly. "It's rotten! But what about the kid?"

The doctor threw out his hands in a despairing gesture. "Total collapse—brain fever—anything.

How can I tell? Her body has been starved, and her brain overfed with distressing thoughts—and then with this heat—well, we'll have to get her out of this, anyway. I'll call an ambulance. She'll have to be taken to a hospital."

"Wait," said Lory sharply. "Jack," turning to her companion, "I think I'm going to be the Good Samaritan. I think I'm going to take this kid home with me. What do you say?"

Jack Marshall stopped in his restless pacing of the room.

"I don't know.—It'd mean a lot of bother for you.—She may be sick for a long time."

"Come over here, Jack."

She led him to the bed. "Now look at her!"

Ruth's face, flushed with fever on the pillow, looked singularly child-like and pathetic. The man nodded:

"I guess you're right, but what are you going to do with her when she gets well?"

Lory shrugged her shoulders. "Time enough to think about that when she is well. Your car is waiting, isn't it?"

"Yes, I told the chauffeur to be back in ten minutes. He must be here now."

"Then we'll take her right home."

The physician looked from one to the other with a gratified smile on his face. "I wish I saw more

of this kind of thing, or maybe," turning to Lory, "you are an angel is disguise."

"Angels don't carry red parasols," she retorted, laughing.

"I said 'in disguise.'"

"Well, I guess it's a blamed good disguise, if I am, taking everything into consideration, but we want to get a move on now and get the kid home. You'll come along, doc?"

The physician took the unconscious girl in his arms, and carried her out to the waiting car. He deposited her on the rear seat, and Lory got in beside her. He remained standing on the step, leaning over into the car, with a finger on the patient's pulse.

"Drive fast," he said to Jack in a low tone.

Lory looked up with a frightened expression on her face. "Does that mean——?"

He nodded without taking his eyes off the patient's face.

Jack took the Eighty-sixth Street cut through the park, where there was little traffic to hinder the speed of the car. The machine careered wildly along the narrow way, and dashed around into Eighth Avenue, missing a trolley car by a fraction of an inch, and continued its flight northward, with a policeman, mounted on a motorcycle, in full pursuit. At Ninety-third Street the driver was

compelled to slow up to avoid collision with a truck, and the policeman ranged alongside. The doctor shouted at him that it was a case of life or death, and he dropped back. The machine flew on, honking out its warning to pedestrians and traffic. At One Hundred and Tenth Street the car turned the corner on two wheels, and rounded into Manhattan Avenue, drawing up suddenly before an apartment house.

Lory sprang out and led the way up to her apartments, the doctor following with his unconscious burden. He laid her on the bed, and breathed a sigh of relief. "I thought she was gone once," he said.

While he was speaking he opened his case and took out a hypodermic. He administered the dose, and watched the result with a satisfied smile.

"She responds nicely. I think we'll pull her through all right."

Lory stood looking over his shoulder. "I wish I'd found her sooner," she said. "I meant to go around to see her a week ago, but—well, you know how easy it is to put things off."

"Then you haven't seen her before—lately, I mean?"

"I only saw her once before. I met her on the train coming from Boston. She was just blowing in from the country, and I was afraid she would

find New York a pretty stiff proposition. That's the reason I looked her up to-day. It was lucky I did."

"Then she's practically a stranger to you?" Lory nodded.

"And yet you—I believe you are an angel, after all."

"Sure she is," put in Jack. "She's always doing things like this, only she doesn't like to be found out. If you hadn't been on the spot, you wouldn't know about this."

The doctor rose to go. "You've restored my faith in human nature," he said lightly, yet there was an undertone of seriousness in the words.

For days Ruth tossed in delirium, and it was only due to Lory's careful nursing that she lived at all. For three days and nights Lory did not leave the bedside, until Jack put his foot down and called in a trained nurse. Lory consented to this simply because she was afraid that her tired body would drop off to sleep and she would neglect the patient.

But the fever finally broke, and then came days when Ruth lay in a listless apathy. She hardly ever spoke, and she did not express gratitude to Lory, but her eyes followed the other woman with a look of adoration. At last the patient's strength began to come back, and one day she broached the subject that lay heavy on her mind.

"Lory," she said weakly, "I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me, but I am getting strong now. I must go away. I must look for work again."

Lory advanced toward the bed menacingly. "Look here, kid, if you want to make me mad, just keep on with that line of talk. You're my guest—my guest, do you understand that? And, what's more, you're going to play the part all summer. You couldn't get a job now to save your soul. In the fall, we'll get you on the stage or something. Anyhow, we can talk about it then, but for the present you're going to stay with me here."

"But," protested Ruth, "I haven't any money. I----"

"What do I care whether you have any money or not?" demanded Lory fiercely. "I've got bunches of it—made it playing the races. Jack got a lot of good tips last week. We'll use that up, and then we'll go out and beat the world on the head until it hollers and coughs up some more."

Ruth laughed,—a little feeble laugh, but still one.

"You're better, kid!" cried the delighted Lory.

"Here I've tried my best to be funny for the last two weeks, and you wouldn't even crack a smile.

I was beginning to think you had lost your sense of humor."

But Ruth returned to the matter under discussion, much to Lory's disgust.

"I can't live on you, Lory. You-"

"I want to ask you one question," interrupted the other. "If I was down and out, wouldn't you stake me for one measly summer, if you had money?"

" Yes, but---"

"Then forget it, and talk about the weather."

And to all Ruth's further protests she turned a deaf ear. Lory was used to having her own way, and she did not intend to depart from her custom in this instance. So the relations between the two girls were drawn. When Ruth was better, Lory insisted on providing her with a wardrobe. "You can't make good in New York unless you have the rags," she told Ruth.

But here for once Ruth was firm—that is, until Lory forced a few tears, when Ruth, in consternation at having wounded her friend, gave in.

And thus it came about that Ruth Lawson remained on as the guest of Lory Williams.

CHAPTER XII

Six weeks had passed since that sweltering June day on which Lory had brought Ruth to her apartment, and in these six weeks much had happened. Under the influence of Lory's cheerful optimism, Ruth's spirits had risen greatly. While there still lurked an expression of sadness in her eyes, her laugh was more frequent, and she looked out into the future with less foreboding.

The principal reason for this changed condition of mind was the fact that in the fall she would go on the stage, and then she would be able to send money home to John and his mother. Lory had made Ruth's success seem so assured that the girl had come to look upon it as almost an accomplished fact. Ruth knew that she could sing well, and she also knew—without vanity—that she was pretty. Lory had taught her enough of stage dancing for her to be confident that she could dance gracefully. Lory was positive in her declaration that Ruth would make a "hit," and Ruth tried to accept her judgment as final, and did her best to dismiss the depressing thoughts that were always springing up in her mind.

In these days she did not miss John. Since her sickness, he and all of her past life in Harbury seemed a dream, and the letters from his mother, documents from another world.—Not that her love for him was dead; had he appeared before her again in possession of his mind, her passion would have revived at a bound, but she had given up all hopes of his recovery, and, if her thoughts did dwell on him, she strove to think of something else, realizing the futility of vain longing.

Ruth was now busily engaged in preparing dinner. At first Lory had insisted that Ruth should do none of the work incidental to running the small household, but when she had found that it was a real pleasure to Ruth she consented. And Ruth was happy in doing whatever she could for Lory's comfort; in a way it allowed her to express the gratitude which Lory would not let her voice, but which she constantly felt.

As she flitted to and fro about the tiny kitchen, her mind was filled with thoughts of her friend. Ruth loved Lory, and her love made her anxious. She could not approve of all Lory's ways, and it worried her. Not that she blamed her friend, for she recognized Lory's habits as the result of environment, but she could never see her smoking cigarettes or drinking highballs, or hear her tell of midnight suppers, poker parties, and playing the

races, and not feel sorry that Lory, who was so good, should do these things.

There was another thing about which Ruth was troubled; Jack came to see Lory almost daily, and Ruth supposed that they were engaged, but Lory never spoke of their marriage. Ruth feared that a case of which she had known in Harbury might be duplicated in her friend's experience. There had been a young woman of Ruth's acquaintance who had "kept company" with a man for ten years, at the end of which time he had married a younger Ruth liked Jack Marshall; he was lightwoman. hearted and boyishly frank, and he had always been very kind to her. But there was a lack of seriousness about him which made her fear for her friend's happiness. Ruth had determined to do all she could to hasten the marriage, and with this end in view had asked Lory when she and Jack were to be married. Lory had stared at her for a moment, and then burst out laughing. "You dear little Puritan." she had cried. Ruth had turned this answer over in her mind for many days, but could make nothing of it. Nor did she dare to venture the question again.

In the time she had been living with Lory, she had met many of Lory's friends and they puzzled her. They talked with direct openness on subjects about which in Harbury it was considered almost

a crime even to think. There were times when Ruth pleaded a headache and escaped to her room, until it became Lory's custom to say: "Ruth, dear, Violette—or some other girl—is coming this afternoon. I guess you had better have a headache." And yet she could not conceive that these girls were not good girls. They all treated her with the greatest kindness: she felt better acquainted with them after knowing them half an hour than she would have in a year of the Harbury brand of friendship. They were singularly simple-hearted and generous, and they were loval to their friends. It was only when their interests in their profession clashed—they were most of them connected with the stage—that they were the opposite. Then they swung to the other extreme, and became absolutely childish in their unreason and jealousy. At first Ruth tried to sum them up according to Harbury standards, but the results were so dismal that she gave it up. She was as much bewildered as she would have been had she been transported to Mars, and endeavored to find out the worth of the inhabitants by their customs. In Harbury it was customary to label people as dogmatically, and with as much precision as one would label specimens of beetles or insects; any man or woman or child who did certain things was good; if they did certain other things, they were bad; that was all there was to it. In Harbury, for in-

stance, Lory would have been labeled bad; her smoking cigarettes in itself would have showed her moral place in life. But Ruth knew that, on the contrary, Lory was one of the best women she had ever met. There were no bounds to her kindness of heart, to her charity. No "hard-luck story" was too preposterous to gain her sympathy: no one in need of a friend ever came to her in vain. And many of the women Ruth met were like Lory. So she despaired of reaching an understanding of them, and rested content to take them at face value, which was in their favor.

This afternoon Ruth was a little nervous, and very much excited, for to-night Benjamin Rudolf, a theatrical manager who, Lory had declared, could make Ruth's success on the stage assured if he chose to, was coming to the house. He was a friend of Lory and Jack's, and they had bulldozed him into coming, which, from the number of times he had put it off, was evidently against his desire. But now he had promised that to-night he would surely arrive.

The dinner was prepared, and Lory did not come. Ruth was disappointed, but not surprised; Lory's punctuality was a trait quite undeveloped. Once in a great while she was on time, but it was merely in the nature of an accident. Ruth waited for an hour, and then ate dinner alone. She was

a little worried, as she always was when Lory did not come home at the exact moment she had said she would, and after finishing dinner roamed restlessly around the little apartment, trying to amuse herself by looking at the pictures with which Lory had covered the walls. Lory had her own idea of art, and in a way she was a collector. Whenever she saw a picture that appealed to her, she bought it, whether it was an oil painting or a penny postal card. She carried it home, and hung it on the wall wherever there happened to be a space; or, if there were none, she tore down something of which she was tired and put the new one there. result was that the walls presented a strange and conglomerate aspect. Of some of the pictures Ruth could not approve; they were what are sometimes called "spicy," but the majority of them were mild enough. A strange incongruity in Lory's nature led her to love pictures of rural life—although she would not have been happy a day in the country and so many of the scenes on the walls were laid in Arcadia. It produced a strange impression to see a scantily clothed ballet girl, with toe pointed toward the sky, between two pictures of pastoral quietude.

After a while she drifted over to the piano. For a time she played listlessly. Then the spirit of the music crept into her heart. She sang. Something,

maybe it was the excitement of the expected visit of Benjamin Rudolf, perhaps it was the passion for harmony that sometimes grips the human soul like a vise—whatever it was, something made her sing as she had not sung since that day so many weary months ago when she was waiting amid the flowers for John's return. And now she sang even better, for then it was a child who sang: now it was a woman, a woman who had suffered, and thus come into the full estate of her womanhood. drifted from one selection to another, some sad. some gay, until at last her fingers dropped from the keys, and she arose. A soft clapping of hands startled her. She turned quickly to look into the laughing faces of Jack and Lory. With them was a man, a stranger.

Lory was delighted about something.

"Oh, it couldn't have been better," she exclaimed joyfully. "Now was I right, Rudy; can she sing?"

The man laughed. "I am fully prepared to admit that she can, but perhaps you had better present me to the young lady. It is rather embarrassing for me to stand here without an introduction."

"Why, you poor dear!" laughed Lory, "and you so shy, too! I ought to be ashamed of myself. Miss Lawson, allow me to present Mr. Benjamin Rudolf, a theatrical manager who has fooled the public into thinking he can put on good shows. Of

course, it is all a bluff, but you must not let him know you think so, or he would feel hurt. Rudy is a sensitive little flower, and——"

"Say, Lory," called Jack from the dining-room, "if you ever get through talking, which I doubt, will you kindly come out here and tell me where you have hidden that corkscrew? You stow it away in a new place every time I come. You must want a fellow to die of thirst."

"No danger of your dying of thirst," retorted Lory. "You'd break the necks off the bottles first. I'll be there in a moment, only don't go mussing around, upsetting everything. It's probably right under your nose."

"I'll bet you that you can't find it yourself," answered Jack in an injured tone. "Hurry up, will you?"

"You two will have to finish introducing yourselves," said Lory, smiling. "You see, he won't be happy till he gets it."

She went into the other room, and Ruth and Benjamin Rudolf were left alone.

"You sing well," he commended gravely. "I never realized before that there was any beauty in some of those things you were singing, but you have convinced me."

Ruth smiled happily. "Thank you," she said. He strolled over to the table to get a cigarette,

and Ruth had a good chance to observe him. So this was the great Benjamin Rudolf, the man who produced more light musical successes than any other manager in America! He was of medium height, rather stocky, and, like many of his race, dark. Yet the resemblance ended there; his features were regular and more like those of a Spaniard than of a Hebrew. In dress he was quiet, and the cut of his clothes was faultless; Ruth divined that they were expensive. He wore no jewelry of any kind, a simple gold scarf-pin being his only ornament. Altogether he was very different from the man whom she had expected to see, for she had drawn a mental image of him as a loud, flashy individual with the traditional diamond sparkling in his shirt front. Lory had told her that Benjamin Rudolf was forty-five years of age, but he did not look it. and when he smiled he might have passed for little more than half that age.

Meanwhile he had lighted his cigarette and taken a seat facing her:

"I understand that you are thinking of the stage as a profession, Miss Lawson."

"Yes," answered Ruth. "Lory seems to think I ought to try it."

"Lory is right," he assented. "You sing far better than the average light-opera comédienne, and, Lory tells me, you dance gracefully. Add to that

fact that you are beautiful, and you have the three attributes for success in musical comedy."

He uttered the praise in an entirely impersonal manner, but Ruth flushed.

He added laughingly, "And you blush prettily. We shall have to make you do that on the stage. So few actresses have the accomplishment."

Ruth laughed frankly at her own embarrassment. "It is rather an awkward habit—blushing—it places one at a disadvantage."

"If to look charming is a disadvantage, it does—in your case."

Ruth was not used to this style of conversation, and she was at a loss to know what to say, but the necessity of an answer was done away with by the reappearance of Jack and Lory, who between them bore the necessary ingredients of a highball. Lory poured out some whisky in a glass. "Say when, Rudy."

" None for me, thank you."

"What?" She looked up, holding the bottle still poised in the air, a comical look of surprise on her face.

"I am not drinking to-night," he said quietly.

Lory still stared at him in astonishment. "The world has come to an end, Jack," she complained, "and we are in the millennium. Rudy's on the water wagon."

- "Not on your life! He's only joking."
- "Are you joking, Rudy?" she asked hopefully.
- "I am not," he answered, smiling. "I do not care to drink to-night."
- "It's queer," said Jack in a doleful voice, "how quickly a perfectly rational man will go off his balance. Why, only on the way up here I was talking to Rudy and he seemed all right. Now look at him, a poor raving imbecile, blind to the delights of a highball."
- "If you had been a little blinder last night, my dear friend," he retorted, laughing, "you would not have had such a headache this morning."
- "Just listen to the man talk!" cried Jack in an aggrieved tone. "When it was he—but there, I won't tell on him. Come on, Lory, let's you and I hie ourselves to the dining-room. I can see that this is no place for us."

Lory assented to this suggestion, dismally declaring that nothing was the same as when she was young.

Ruth somewhat doubted the propriety of her being left alone with Rudolf, but he gave her no chance to follow the others.

"Now that the children are disposed of," he said lightly, "we can talk business. I'm just wondering what part will suit you best. You are the right size for the pony ballet, but the work is pretty hard;

I would not want to see you attempt it. You are not tall enough for a show girl—the Gibson type is all the rage just now—so——" He paused.

Ruth's face fell.

- "So I think," he went on deliberately, "that we will have to create a part especially for you."
- "A part especially for me!" cried Ruth in astonishment.
- "Oh, that is not as important as it sounds!" he hastened to say. "In a show like 'The Parisian Milliner,' which I am putting on this fall, a special part means only that we introduce a few new songs, and lines enough to give an excuse for them."
- "Do you mean that you will do this?" she asked, hardly able to believe her ears.
- "That is the meaning I am trying to convey. If you will come down to my office to-morrow morning at ten, I will tell you the details. Rehearsals will begin in a few weeks from now."
 - "I don't know how I can thank you---'
- "Don't thank me at all," he interrupted. "It is merely a matter of business. I think that your being in 'The Parisian Milliner' will improve the show. That's all there is to it. And now," he went on, rising, "I must run along. I just dropped in for a moment to see you. I confess, Miss Lawson, that I did not want to come. Lory and Jack fairly had to drag me here, but even they cannot

keep me away now that I have seen you. It may be foolish—I hope it is not—but I feel that we are to be good friends."

"You are very kind," answered Ruth. She felt uncomfortable in the face of his open admiration.

"Will you say good-by to Lory and Jack for me? There is no need of disturbing them. Till to-morrow morning," he said, holding out his hand.

He kept Ruth's hand just a shade longer than the Harbury conventions would have deemed proper: then, with a cheerful good-night, was gone. Ruth stood where he had left her, a trifle bewildered by her sudden good fortune. A special part in "The Parisian Milliner!" It was beyond her wildest dreams. At last opportunity had knocked at her door when she was least expecting it, and what an opportunity! She could almost see herself on the stage receiving the applause of a crowded house. Exultation surged up in her heart. Then something stirred in the depths of her soul, the warning of a woman's intuition, but she crushed it almost before it was conceived. There had been nothing in Rudolf's manner to warrant such a sus-She imagined even that his not drinking was meant as a mark of respect to her.

As she turned toward the dining-room to tell Lory the good news, there was nothing but joy in her heart.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Ruth entered the dining-room, Lory was sitting on the table, swinging her feet, and smoking a cigarette. Jack was leaning back in a chair, lazily smiling at something she was telling him and puffing contentedly on a black cigar. As Ruth came through the door, Jack glanced up.

"Where's Rudy?" he asked. "Did his ride on the water wagon kill him, or did he talk himself to death telling you of his successes?" This was a standard joke of Rudolf's friends, as he could never be led to talk of his triumphs. Jack launched it joyfully at the ears of the unseen target, whom he supposed to be in the next room.

"He's gone," answered Ruth. "He---"

"Gone!" cried Lory, jumping down from the table and facing Ruth. "You didn't---"

"Oh, Lory!" interrupted Ruth. "You can never guess what he's going to do for me. He's going to give me a special part in 'The Parisian Milliner.' Just think of it—a special part!"

There was a second's silence, in which a glance passed between Jack and Lory. Then Lory caught Ruth in her arms. "Oh, I'm so glad," she said.

There was a restraint in her tone, a lack of the hearty joy which Ruth had expected, and she felt vaguely wounded. Jack's congratulations, too, seemed forced. Ruth wondered at it even after she went to her room, but she decided that no one else could possibly feel about her success the way she herself did. She set herself to looking into the future, and imagining how it would feel to be an actress. Her thoughts were all rose-tinted. The air castles, which had been leveled to the earth in the last few months, now rose in doubled splendor. She settled her head on the pillow, once more deciding that the world was a friendly place, after all.

In the dining-room, after Ruth had left, Jack and Lory sat in a silence which neither seemed desirous of breaking.

"Well?" said Jack at last.

Lory shook her head helplessly. "I had hoped," she said with a trace of weariness in her voice, "that Rudy would not be attracted, and yet I knew all along that he would. She's too pretty, that's what's the trouble, Jack, she's too pretty. I thought," she went on after a moment, "that maybe he would give her a part in the chorus, and then I thought—because she really has ability—that she could make her own way. But this special-part business knocks all that in the head. Have you tried all the other managers you know?"

Jack nodded. "The city is literally overrun with chorus girls. There are twice as many as there are places for them. And, of course, the managers will give preference to those who have experience. You know how hard it was to get Rudy interested in her. To get him to see her at all, I had to tell him how pretty she is. That's what I blame myself for. It makes me feel guilty somehow."

Again there was a silence.

"There's no use talking about what has happened. The thing for us to do is to decide what is best to be done now," Jack said.

"Have you an idea?"

"No. Have you?"

Lory shook her head. "The kid has got to have money. You and I know that she will not be able to get any job that will give her enough to support herself and send money home, unless it is a pretty good thing on the stage. I counted on her getting something in the chorus for a few months, until she had experience, and then maybe something better would turn up. In the meantime I might make her accept a loan from me on the strength of her prospects."

"Can't you get her to go on living here? You are not going on the road next season. I'd be willing to put up the money."

"She would not do it. She only stays now be-

cause I keep telling her that in the fall she will get a position on the stage, and then can pay me back."

Jack looked moodily at the end of his cigar. "I don't like it. It's too much like a trap; she's so plagued innocent."

"Do you think I like it any better?" retorted Lory. "If I could see any other way out for the kid, I'd take it. But I've been thinking this thing over for days—ever since Rudolf promised to come, and I'm all in; I can't think of a thing."

"There's one thing about it," said Jack slowly. "Rudy will give her a good send-off. If he takes a liking to a girl, he isn't niggardly. And then after that she can snap her fingers at him."

"That's just it. She'll make a hit. I am as sure of it as I am that I'm sitting here. And it will mean so much to her. On the other hand, supposing I should go to her and tell her what kind of a man Rudolf is, what then? She'd turn him down, and probably would insist on starting out again looking for a job. And she can't get one, Jack. It's—it's hell!"

"Maybe she will kick over the traces at the last moment, anyway."

Lory laughed cynically. "Trust Rudolf for that. He has sized her up already. Did you notice that he refused to drink in her presence to-night? I did not see the point at the time, but now I know it was in line with the rôle he will play. He will be, oh! so respectful and kind and friendly, until he has showed her what success on the stage means, until he has educated her to luxury."

- "That's Rudy's way," said Jack gloomily. "I used to think him clever. God!"
- "If Ruth were like most of the girls we know, it would be different. Most of them would sell their souls for a chance to gain Rudolf's influence. If she has any sort of ability, and I know she has, she'll be a star in a few years. Then, if she were like most of them, she would thank us for not having interfered."
 - "But in her case-"
 - "That's it. She's different."
- "Maybe," said Jack with an undertone of hope in his voice, "Rudy will run straight with her. Maybe he will see that she is different, and respect her for it. He has been thrown in with a fast crowd, and is pretty rotten, as we all are, but there's probably a lot of good in him. He may fall in love with her, and marry her. Stranger things have happened."
- "I've never told you before, because I did not want it to get around, but she is already married, Jack."
 - "What? Where's her husband then?"

Lory told him the details of the case in a few words.

Jack was silent when she finished.

"So you see," said Lory, "she's got to have money. There's no use talking about what she ought to do, or the right thing to do. There isn't anything she can do but get money. It's the old story. People talk about morals and all that, but when you come right down to the bottom of the question, you find that money is the basis of the whole thing. You can't live without money, and there isn't anyone who's going to give it to you. Ruth isn't the only girl that's been up against that proposition."

"Then you don't think you could induce her to stay here with you, and cook up some excuse for paying her a salary?"

"It's awfully good of you, Jack, but I know she wouldn't do it."

"Then the only thing we can do is to let things drift, and hope that something will turn up."

"We can hope," said Lory with a trace of bitterness in her voice, "but things don't usually turn up that way."

All that night Lory lay awake trying to devise some plan by which Ruth might escape from Benjamin Rudolf's influence, but she could find no way out of the dilemma. On the one side rose, as a barrier, poverty, and Ruth was in dire need of money; on the other hand—she did not like to think of it.

At first, when she had come to live with her, Lory had thought some of Ruth's innocence was affectation. It was hard for Lory to realize, reared as she had been in the midst of certain conditions, how anyone could be ignorant of them, nor could she understand the fineness of feeling which made Ruth color up at things which seemed commonplace to her. But as time passed Lory came to the conclusion that Ruth was sincere and good, with a delicacy of nature which Lory must respect even if she did not understand. And, strangely enough, the very quality which Lory would have condemned in other girls as prudery drew her closer to Ruth. Now she would have given anything she possessed to shield her friend from the temptations and villainy of the world. There may have been some way: some plan might have been devised to avert the peril; but Lory did not know of any. tossed and turned until daylight shone through her window, but she was as far away from a solution as she had been the previous night.

So in the end she decided that all she could do was to help make the success so big that, if the price were high, still there would be something to be said on the other side.

CHAPTER XIV

RUDOLF turned toward the elevated station. He had an engagement to meet a couple of friends at Morini's. His thoughts were occupied with the girl he had just left. He felt she would do well on the stage, and not in years had he met a woman who attracted him so much. Her petite daintiness pleased him, her ethereal beauty stirred him to the depths of his being. And then there was something about her—something he vaguely realized but could not understand.

"I'll give her a chance," he told himself. "From what I have heard, she has had a pretty hard time."

Benjamin Rudolf was, to a certain extent, the product of his environment. If one sets a child in the midst of a swamp, one does not wonder if the child becomes dirty, nor should it cause surprise that Rudolf, thrown into daily contact with a type—or perhaps it would be as accurate to say, attracting to himself a type—to whom the honor of a woman is a joke, should come to look on it as a matter of small moment.

In the present case he regarded himself as a

benefactor. He had found Ruth penniless; he would give her comparative wealth. He had found her unknown; he would develop her into a star and make her name famous in every city in the country. He felt sorry for her, that she had met with so much adversity since coming to New York, and was glad that it lay in his power to make her lot in life easier. He would do his best to help her succeed on the stage.

Yet such was his accustomed trend of thought. and he was one of a large class of men, that it did not occur to him, except in a vague way, that he might do all this for nothing. He accepted the price as a matter of course—looked upon it in the light of an ordinary business bargain. he contemplated doing a woman an injury for which nothing could atone, never once entered his mind. He knew that she would object to paying the price. He knew that he would have to lav his plans carefully to induce her to enter into the agreement. He felt, even on such short acquaintance, that she was one of the few women he knew who did not look lightly on this sort of thing, but he viewed the matter in much the same light as a business man would, who tries to induce another to take up a proposition desirable for them both, even if he has to argue the other into it against his will. Had anyone told him that he was guilty

of the deepest villainy, he would have been surprised and indignant, and would have defended himself by saying that he was no worse than other men, that it was impossible for a poor girl to get along in New York without a "protector," and what difference did it make whether it were he or some other man? If his accuser denounced him for deliberately laying a trap to ensnare a woman, against her will, he would have replied that he was giving her a fair return, and that the day would come when she would see it in that light, even if she did not at first.

Rudolf walked along smiling to himself, well pleased that chance had thrown Ruth in his way. Once he chuckled at the recollection of his refusing to drink. "That was the right line to take," he told himself. "I'll stick to it."

When he reached Morini's, the two men whom he was to meet were already there. These two were always together. Ned Redburn was a short, jolly, little man, whose fat face was wrinkled by much laughter, for he looked upon the whole world as a joke, and himself as the biggest joke of all. Franklin Morris was of a more sober turn of mind, and, had circumstances been otherwise, he would have used his unusually keen mind to some advantage, but he had been born rich, and a natural apathy of disposition prevented him from being

anything but an idler. Both men, in fact, lived merely for pleasure, both were members of that mysterious class vaguely known as "men about town," and both had been in love with the same woman. It had worried them, at the time of their desperate infatuation for Margaret Livingstone, to think that when she married one of them—each was equally sure it would be the other—their friend-ship might be, to a certain extent, broken up. But she had settled the matter, happily for herself, by marrying neither, but instead an earnest young worker in the world of affairs. This common sorrow had drawn them even closer together, until now they were happy only when in each other's company.

As usual, Redburn was in the midst of the recital of a huge joke in which he had figured.

"The funniest thing I ever heard of," he declared rapturously. "There was I without a cent—I'd bet my last penny on the sixth race—and I couldn't find a man I knew in the whole crowd. Thought sure it was a case of walk home for me, and——"

"So that's your idea of a joke, is it?" commented Rudolf, dropping into a chair. "I don't think I would enjoy that particular brand."

"Oh, hello, Rudy! Thought you'd eloped. What'll you have to drink?"

Rudolf gave his order. "Go on with the joke. Did you have to walk home?"

"Wait till you hear. Well, as I was saying, I didn't have a red cent and I couldn't find a friend to touch. Why, any other time I'd seen thousands of 'em—positively thousands—but nary a one when I wanted 'em. But at last I did see a fellow I sort of half knew—used to see him over at the yards when I was having the yacht overhauled—so I went up to him and asked him for a loan. What do you think he said?"

He leaned back in anticipated joy at the others' inability to guess.

"Oh, hurry up, Ned, get it over with!" said Morris impatiently. "What's the use of being so painfully long-winded?"

Redburn was not a bit abashed by his friend's lack of appreciation; he was used to it. That was one strange feature of their friendship; they always irritated each other.

"What do you guess, Rudy?"

"I guess he told you to go to the devil, as I should have."

"The very thing!" cried Redburn joyfully. "He told me to go to the devil, and I banged him one, and the coppers had to pull us apart. I'd 'a' got arrested, too, if there hadn't been a copper I knew in the bunch. I told him about it, and he let

me go, and lent me enough money to buy a ticket home. I offered him a V if he'd lock the other fellow up—just for a joke, you know—but he wouldn't."

- "Probably knew he'd never get the V," suggested Rudolf dryly.
- "Maybe that was the trouble," assented Ned. "Say, that reminds me of a story——"
- "For Heaven's sake, Ned," cut in Morris, "aren't you going to let Rudy and me get a word in edgewise all evening? This isn't a monologue act, you know. What have you been up to, Rudy?"
- "Been calling on a friend of Lory's who wants to go on the stage."
- "Not that girl who's staying with her?" demanded Ned, uneclipsed by his friend's admonition.

Rudolf nodded.

- "Then you'll be able to appreciate the greatest joke ever. Morry and I were up there the other night with Jack, and—say, isn't she a little peach! Did you ever see such tiny hands and feet on anything but a baby? And talk about eyes—"
- "Let's have the story," interrupted Rudolf. "You can cut out the description; we have all seen her."
 - "Well, as she was living with Lory, I thought

she was a little Bohemian, you know; so, after I'd had a couple of highballs, I started to put my arm around her. Gad, you ought to have seen the look she gave me. I'd 'a' crawled under the sofa if I hadn't been so fat."

"Too bad you couldn't," said Morris sarcastically. "You ought to have your fat head punched. Anyone with half an eye could see that she wouldn't stand for that kind of thing."

"Say, Rudy," said Redburn, ignoring his friend's criticism, "I've been wondering whether she knows about Lory and Jack."

Rudolf fingered his glass a moment before replying. "Of course I don't know, but, from what Jack has told me, I rather think she does not. She is from the country—down in New England somewhere—and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she did not know of the—er—existing conditions."

"How does she come to be living with a girl like Lory?" asked Morris earnestly.

"She was sick, I believe, and Lory found her, and took her home. I guess the girl found New York a pretty stiff proposition to handle. She came here to earn her living, and pretty nearly starved to death."

"What's she going to do now?" asked Morris.
"Is she going to live with Lory right along?"

"Why, I think I'll look after her myself. I'm

THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE 129 going to give her a special part in 'The Parisian Milliner.'"

"Good for you, Rudy!" exclaimed Redburn. "I know you'll give her a good send-off, and me for the bald-headed row the first night."

But Morris did not echo his friend's enthusiasm. He looked sharply at Rudolf, then dropped his eyes, and frowned at his glass.

Rudolf regarded him with an amused smile. Yet a moment later the three men were deeply engrossed in a discussion as to the comparative merits of two well-known pugilists who were to meet in the ring in a few days.

CHAPTER XV

WHETHER it was because of the supper at Morini's or the heat of the August night, Rudolf did not know, but at any rate he lay awake long after he had retired. And all the time he was thinking of Ruth. When he at last fell asleep he had a dream.

He dreamed that he and she were walking through a pine forest, he could smell the fresh, clean odor of the trees, could see the clear blue of the sky between their tall tops, could hear the soft sighing of the wind among their branches. He felt his heart beat with a new, pure emotion. He felt the power of a mighty passion, such as he had never known, surging through his veins. He was filled with an irresistible longing, not for his own, but for her happiness. The desire to protect her from the world, from himself, if need be, burned deep into his heart. With these feelings came another—reverence for a woman. He trembled in his unworthiness, and his tongue refused the words of love that rushed up from his breast. While he hesitated the vision faded, and he awoke.

But the impression of the dream remained. An unaccustomed shame swept over him. For an in-

stant he knew himself as he really was. Then he angrily shook off the feeling, and strove to restore his thoughts to their normal trend, but in this endeavor he was not entirely successful. He ate his breakfast with a strangely dissatisfied feeling, and instead of riding to his office in his car, as was his custom, walked down, thinking to overcome the strange condition of his nerves. And this he succeeded in doing to a certain extent, but whenever he thought of Ruth the dream impression took the place of the feeling he had held toward her the night before. Not that Rudolf was in love, he was far from it. He would have repudiated the dream feeling if he could: his waking consciousness did not endorse it in the least, but still, in his subconscious mentality, there remained certain sensations which the dream had called into life. It was these of which, try as he might, he could not rid himself.

When he arrived at the office, he found his partner in a state of excitement, but, as that was not an uncommon condition with Sam Andrews, he did not attach any importance to the phenomenon. Samuel Andrews was one of the men who worry through life. If he had real troubles, he fretted himself almost into a state of nervous prostration, and, if he had no real troubles, he invented imaginary ones and hugged them tightly to his bosom.

His flabby countenance was almost always creased in lines of vexation, and his pale blue eyes constantly wore a frightened expression, as if he suspected Fate of being about to overwhelm him.

"Good-morning, Sam," said Rudolf gravely to that corpulent individual. "If you don't stop worrying, you'll get thin. I had an old aunt who used to fuss around like you do, and she became thin as a rail. What is the trouble now? Has the Prohibition movement been gaining ground, or is there a strike of the 'Chorus Ladies' Union'?"

"There's hell to pay," responded Sam, holding out a letter in his shaking hand. "Tessie Darlington wants to be released from her contract. She says she's going to be married and retire from the stage. How in the devil are we to find another Sylvia at this late day?"

Rudolf took the letter, and scanned its many pages. It was a request, as Sam had stated, that she be released from her contract to play Sylvia, the leading part in "The Parisian Milliner." Between the lines Rudolf read that, if she were not released, she would make things as uncomfortable for everyone concerned as she possibly could. Rudolf decided that, in this case, Sam had some cause for worry. The whole play centered on that part; with a Sylvia who would appeal to the public, the show would be a success; otherwise, it would be

characterized, as indeed it was, a bundle of nonsense with music clearly reminiscent of many other productions of late years.

He finished the letter, and leaned back in his chair, holding up an impatient hand to forestall another outburst from his partner. And then, in a second, a plan leaped into his mind, a plan so fantastic, so utterly opposed to his business instinct, his managerial experience, that he thought he must be mad to think of it. But the thought was per-Then came the question, why not? He tried to array all the facts pro and con in his mind, but they refused to be so arrayed. He could think of only the one overshadowing demand of this strange conception-Ruth Lawson should be Sylvia! Already in his mind's eye he saw her, dainty and demure, with the beauty of a flower, tripping through the umbrella dance, or lifting her sweettoned soprano in the Violet song. He could hear the applause of the enraptured audience, and, as he had the money instinct of his race, could imagine the size of the box-office receipts. Yes: why not? She could sing well—he knew that—and he trusted Lory's judgment about her dancing, and Lory had said Ruth was the most graceful dancer she had ever seen. Indeed, he knew that she must be. The acting amounted to very little; he could teach her He felt that she would do that well, also.

Yes; Ruth Lawson should be Sylvia. Yet he would do nothing rash. He would try her in the part at a rehearsal. If she failed, he would have to hold Tessie Darlington to her contract.

And then, in an instant, he had mapped out a scheme of advertising. He would publish the fact abroad that he had discovered a comédienne of such extraordinary ability that he, Benjamin Rudolf, who had never yet put on a failure, was willing to stake his reputation on her success, although she had never been on the stage in her life. He would have his press agent work up a romantic story about the little country girl who came to New York. He would dilate on her hardships, her sickness, and finally her elevation to a star in a Broadway production at one bound. The public's curiosity would be whetted. They would flock to the theater. It would be the greatest sensation ever known in theatrical circles. Unconsciously he smiled.

"I'd like to know what you find so very funny about it," demanded Sam angrily.

Rudolf had forgotten his partner's presence. He turned with a start. Then a boyish desire to shock Sam came over him. He could imagine his partner's consternation at the news. He tipped his chair back, and put the points of his fingers together, looking at his partner with an expression of careless good humor.

"You need not worry about Tessie Darlington. I know a young woman who will make a far better Sylvia than she."

Sam's face showed relief. Then the worry sprang again into his eyes.

"Tell me who she is," he exclaimed excitedly, "so that I can go to her right off with the contract. Some one may snap her up while we are fooling around here."

Rudolf smiled calmly. "I scarcely think she will be snapped up before ten o'clock, at which hour I have an appointment with her here. In fact," he went on slowly, his eyes on the other's face, "I doubt if there is another manager in New York who would want her. You see, this young woman has never been on the stage in her life."

Sam's eyes bulged out. "Is this a joke, or are you crazy—or drunk?"

"I didn't mean it as a joke, and I am not drunk. As to being crazy——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are thinking of putting an amateur on to play Sylvia?" demanded Sam in a choked voice.

"That's about it."

"My God! You are crazy."

"Not at all," returned Rudolf easily. "I am gifted with second sight, that's all. I see her bring-

ing down the house, and bringing in the money. I have heard her sing. I have been told by one on whose judgment I can rely that she is a graceful dancer, and she is as pretty as a picture. It is She will make a hit. But to quiet your enough. nerves, which seem to be a little disordered this morning, you may write to Tessie, and tell her that we shall do our best to fill her place, but, failing that, we will be obliged to hold her to her contract. Put in the usual felicitations on her approaching marriage and be careful not to make the letter sound like a threat. Tessie is easy to handle if you coax her, but if you try to drive her—well, she is the devil. Now supposing you run out and get a drink before you go all to pieces and get to writhing on the floor."

Sam waddled out, a ludicrous look of consternation on his fat face, muttering to himself, and shaking his head dolefully. He saw ruin staring the firm of Rudolf and Andrews in the face. Not that one failure, or even two or three, could accomplish the downfall of so wealthy and influential a firm, but if Rudolf was losing his grip this way——

After Sam had left, Rudolf turned to his desk, but not to work. His letters lay unopened while he traced designs on the blotting pad.

Rudolf had lightly told his partner that he was gifted with second sight. As a matter of fact, he

was endowed, as are so many of his race, with a rare intuition. A great part of his business success was the result of this characteristic. He had done things almost as daring as this before; Tessie Darlington herself he had discovered in the chorus of a burlesque show, and, after trying her for one season in a minor part, had launched her as a star. The critics had backed up his judgment.

Besides, Rudolf was a great believer in the power of advertising. He would make the public think they were to be startled into astonished admiration, and the chances were, a thousand to one, that they would be. He knew that there were many comic-opera stars on the stage who were not nearly so pretty as Ruth, who had not half the voice she possessed, and were surely not as graceful in dancing as he knew she must be, yet they drew crowds year after year through the merit of advertising. And, then, the part fitted Ruth as if it had been written for her. Sylvia, the little Parisian milliner, about whom the play was woven, was just another such girl as Ruth. Now, after he had thought of them as one, he could hardly keep the real Ruth separate in his mind from the Sylvia of the fiction. He was sure that she would measure up to his judgment, that she would be a success. Already he had almost dismissed the thought, that Tessie might have to take the part after all,

from his mind. He realized that he had arrived at a decision at one jump, when it would take most men months of consideration to come to the point of being willing to put an unknown and inexperienced woman on the stage as a star. Yet he believed his judgment to be sound enough to warrant the experiment on strictly business grounds. Yet deep in his heart was another motive, and it was this motive which influenced him more than any other, although he did not realize it. The dream had awakened a desire to shower all the good things of the world on the girl. To give her merely a fair part, and gradually lead her up to success, was not now enough. He was impatient to see her at the top, enthroned in luxury, wealth, and power. He was anxious that she know it was he who had done all this for her. She must feel that she owed everything to him, and it would be strange if, when she did realize all this, she would not feel a gratitude that was akin to love. And if he did all this for her—if, at the risk of a great money loss, to say nothing of impaired prestige, he was willing to do this-surely the return he would ask was very small.

Thus he reasoned, and by such devious arguments he justified his course and succeeded in quieting, for the time being, the outcries of a conscience which had been reawakened by the dream.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Ruth awoke the next morning, she wondered for a moment why she was so happy. Then she remembered. She sprang out of bed and hastened into Lory's room.

"Wake up!" she cried gayly, shaking her.

Lory opened her eyes. "What's the matter?" she asked sleepily.

- "A great actress has come to see you. Hurry and get up."
 - "Who?" demanded Lory, starting up.
- "Why, me! Don't you remember? I'm to be a 'footlight favorite.' Just think of it, Lory, dear!" She laughed joyously.
- "Oh—you!" answered Lory in pretended disdain. "I thought maybe Sara Bernhardt had dropped in to borrow some money. But you're all right, kid. I knew, if he heard you sing, it'd be you for the boards."

So Lory answered jestingly, although there was a dull pain at her heart. Yet she was somewhat of a philosopher. She had decided that she could do nothing; there was no use of worrying. Maybe things would straighten themselves out somehow.

"You're in luck, kid. 'You've got a great chance. Rudolf will make your fortune."

"If he does, you deserve half." She sat down on the bed, and became serious. "I owe it all to you. I often shudder to think what would have become of me if you had not been so kind. And I was a perfect stranger to you, yet you brought me home. Why, for all you knew, I might have been—anything!"

Lory drew her down and kissed her impulsively. "I'd take the risk of your being—'anything," she mimicked. "What time are you going down to see Rudy?"

- "At ten o'clock. I hope he hasn't changed his mind."
- "No danger," answered Lory, although she almost wished he had.
- "I can't imagine why he offered me such a good position. There must be lots of girls who are ever so much more clever than I am. Why, he doesn't even know whether I can dance or not."
- "Oh, I told him that! I told him that, if he gave you a job, you'd make good, all right."
- "I hope I can. Oh, I do hope I won't disappoint him!"

Lory laughed dryly.

"Why do you laugh like that?" Ruth demanded uneasily.

"Because you're so blamed modest," answered Lory evasively.

Ruth went back into her own room to dress. and Lory relapsed into thought. She was overjoyed to see Ruth so happy. Indeed, she could hardly believe that she was the same girl, and, if just the anticipation of success could produce such a change, was not the real thing itself worth a great deal? Perhaps Ruth would come to look at it in that light herself. She was glad that she had not vielded to the impulse to warn Ruth. She already felt a little ashamed of her heroics—thus she labeled her conversation with Jack, of the previous night. Now, in the light of Ruth's evidently high estimate of her good fortune, things did not seem so bad, after all. She settled down for another nap with a calmer and more hopeful mind. was soon disturbed again by Ruth's voice from the other room:

- "Lor-ree! What dress shall I wear?"
- "Oh, any one—that old brown one will be good enough!"

An exclamation of disgust reached Lory's ears, and she chuckled. "The kid's waking up," she said to herself.

And Lory was right. The sudden good fortune, following on the heels of so many adversities, rolled back to the span of Ruth's life, and blotted out

the past year of misery. Her self-esteem had been restored, and with it had come her native high spirits. She sang happily to herself as she dressed.

The clock on the wall of Rudolf's office was striking ten when Ruth's name was announced.

"Show her in at once," he said to the young woman who brought the information.

She hesitated. "That letter from Dresier and Company came this morning. Did you notice it?" She glanced meaningly at the pile of unopened mail.

"It can wait," answered Rudolf impatiently. "Show Miss Lawson in."

The young woman obeyed, casting a curious glance at the girl who could make Ben jamin Rudolf put aside business.

Ruth was attired in a white-duck stuit with a broad sailor collar. Her hair was gat hered in a simple knot on the nape of her neck. , She looked indescribably pretty and girlish.

"You see, I am on time, Mr. Rudoln f." she said, smiling brightly.

He rose to greet her. As he did so, the dream feeling swept over him, and his answer was tinged with an unaccustomed embarrassment.

"It is always well to be punctual," he said, and,

as soon as he had said it, knew it to be a banal remark.

Ruth laughed, a merry laugh. "You said that quite like a schoolmaster," she observed.

"I admit the charge," he returned lightly, having recovered himself. "Anyway, it was a laudable sentiment."

"Oh, laudable-certainly!"

He was quite as surprised in the change in her as Lory had been, and quite as pleased. This girlish vivacity suited him even better than her timidity of last evening. He was glad that she was not dull.

She sat down and glanced around the room. The office was furnished simply, almost barely. The desk at which Rudolf was sitting would not have brought five dollars at auction. She was somewhat surprised. He caught her thought.

"It is not very artistic, is it? You see, this is the way it was when I started twenty years ago, although my office was then in another building and, well, I have a fondness for the old things—familiar associations and all that."

She nodded. "I understand," she said. "And now," she went on brightly, "about my part?"

He picked up a ruler from his desk and fingered it nervously:

"I have a request to make, for which I cannot

give an adequate explanation. Call it a whim or anything you like—it is in reference to your part." She was all attention.

"The leading character in 'The Parisian Milliner' is a young girl, who, brought up in a convent, is thrown among the very opposite conditions in Paris. Miss Darlington will play the part the coming season, but I have a desire to see you in the rôle. Of course, there is the regular understudy, but I want you to be able to take the part at a rehearsal. As you probably know, the star appears at rehearsals only when she cannot possibly find any excuse for skipping them. Sometimes the understudy is sick, or must be absent for some other reason, so it is not a bad thing to have an extra. If you are willing to be this extra, it will mean a good deal of work for you, but it will be good training."

"Why, of course I am willing!" cried Ruth eagerly. "I shall love to."

"Good!" He was relieved that she asked no questions. "Of course, your salary will be the same whether you are doing this work or appearing in a regular part, and we will decide about the part, of which I spoke to you last night, later. Your salary will be thirty dollars a week to begin with. If you wish, I will give you an advance on it now." He reached for his check-book.

A sudden uncertainty leaped into Ruth's mind. "Oh, no!" she said, drawing back. "I will wait until my work begins."

"Very well."

"But are you sure I am worth so much money? It seems like a great deal."

"My dear Miss Lawson," he said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye, "you should not ask such a question; it is very amateurish. You are to be an actress, therefore you should endeavor to act like one. What you should have said was that you thought you should have forty."

"I can say it yet," she retorted.

"Oh, no! Opportunity knocks but once, you know. But remember next time."

"I will," she promised, laughing.

He touched a button on his desk. "Bring the part of Sylvia to me," he said to the young woman who answered his summons.

When it was brought, he placed it in Ruth's hands. She scanned the typewritten pages earnestly, a little frown of concentration on her face. As Rudolf sat watching her, he was gripped again by the dream feeling. He swung back to his desk impatiently.

"I must be getting in my second childhood," he muttered, taking up his mail.

But he did not open it. Instead, in a moment,

he shamefacedly swung his chair back again, and stole a look at her.

At last she looked up. "It is very clever," she commented, "but I think some of the lines could be improved."

He looked amused. "Are you yearning to become a playwright, Miss Lawson?"

A sudden realization of her temerity swept over her.

"I should not have made the suggestion," she apologized. "I was so interested that I forgot——"

"No, no!" he protested. "You are perfectly right. Often a novice judges more nearly from the viewpoint of the audience than we of the profession, who naturally look at everything from the stage point of view. If you find any lines you think you can improve, make the alterations and show them to me. I want you to feel an interest in the part."

She rose. "I will not take up any more of your time, Mr. Rudolf."

"I am not busy," he protested. "Won't you wait and go out to lunch with me? It is nearly twelve now."

She declined, and he had to let her go, although, yielding to an impulse for which he could not account, he stood at the window and watched her

go up the street until she was lost to his view in the crowd. Then he turned back to the desk, and plunged into his work. But the face of Ruth had a way of obtruding in his thoughts and driving out the business in hand. Once in the midst of dictating a letter, he relapsed into a brown study, from which he was aroused by his stenographer, who was patently amused. He finally gave it up and went out to lunch.

On Broadway near Thirty-ninth Street, he encountered Ned Redburn.

"Hello, Rudy!" cried this little man gayly. "Wait till you hear the joke on Fred Van Horn! It's the best ever."

But Rudolf pushed by him with a muttered excuse that he was in a hurry, and left Ned staring after him with a comical expression of dismay on his chubby face.

"Well, I wonder what has got into Rudy!" he exclaimed. "I never knew him to act that way before." He stood shaking his head in perplexity, a puzzled frown on his face.

But the frown soon disappeared, and his countenance relapsed into its usual smiling, self-complacent condition.

"That's a good one on me, all right. Cut dead on the street. Gad! What will Morry say when he hears it? He's always saying that I am get-

ting to be a bore. Guess I won't tell him. Yes, I will, too—it's too good to keep."

Rudolf continued on his way to the club. There he met a man who had a business proposition to make, and Rudolf forgot for a time about Ruth. But, on his return to the office, she was recalled to his mind. There was the chair in which she had sat; he could picture to himself exactly how she looked. Seized with a sudden burst of impatience, he flung the chair across the room. Again he took up his work, but work was not for Rudolf that day. He found himself making inconceivable blunders; he dictated a letter, concerning an important business matter, to the wrong firm. Sam discovered the error.

"Look here, Ben," he said hotly. "If you want to get drunk, why all right, but for God's sake don't do it during business hours. What d'ye think these people would have thought of you if I hadn't got onto this?"

Rudolf made a pretense of calmly going on with a letter he was writing, but inwardly he was boiling with fury—against Sam for having discovered his mistake.

"Do you hear what I say?" shouted Sam. He had a slumbering temper, but when it was aroused it was wide-awake.

"You go to the devil," Rudolf hissed at his

partner, and left the office, banging the door behind him.

Sam stared at the door a moment, then he chuckled. "I got a rise out of Bennie that time, all right." A thought struck him, and turned his face sober. "I wonder if anything is the matter with him. He's acted devilish queer all day. This morning—about that Sylvia business—and now—I wonder——" He worried about it all the rest of the afternoon.

In the meantime, Rudolf had gone into a nearby drug store and telephoned for his car, and was now striding angrily up and down in front of the office waiting for it.

"The blamed fool!" he kept saying to himself.

"Just an ordinary mistake—the blamed fool!"

When his car came he dismissed the chauffeur, and, taking the wheel, began to drive recklessly amid the Broadway traffic, until he was brought up short by an officer, who arrested him and haled him before a magistrate. Rudolf paid his fine sullenly, and started out once more, but this time in a more subdued spirit.

He turned east to Fifth Avenue, and before many minutes had elapsed was spinning through Central Park. Emerging from the park, he crossed over to Riverside Drive, and, turning north, was soon out of the city, where he could let the car go.

The cool breeze of the August afternoon acted as a sedative on his mind, and, when he returned some hours later to his apartment, he was once more in his normal condition.

Yet that day a seed had been planted in the man's soul, which was to cause him hours of mental agony and lead him into strange situations. But this Rudolf did not know. He felt that, whatever might have been the matter with him that day, at least now he was cured.

CHAPTER XVII

THE next two weeks Ruth saw Benjamin Rudolf daily, and, as is the case when two people are united by a common interest, she felt better acquainted with him than she would have in months of ordinary friendship. She was certain that he felt a sincere liking for her, and she liked him better than any man she had ever known, except John. He was unfailingly kind and sympathetic, listening gravely to all her troubles about her part, helping her with suggestions, and encouraging her with praise; yet it was not indiscriminate praise.

The night before he had stopped her in the middle of the lines she was supposed to be speaking to the baron.

"That will not do, Sylvia." He always addressed her as Sylvia now, and she did not resent it. "You must put more feeling into the words. Here, let me be the baron."

Without a second's hesitation, he took up the baron's lines which preceded her cue and went through them without a break. It was always a matter of astonishment to Ruth to find how much

he knew about the play; he seemed to have committed every part of it to memory.

"Now," he said, "talk to me. Imagine that you are in love with me. Let yourself go; throw yourself into it. No, no!" he exclaimed impatiently, seeing her flush. "This is entirely impersonal, a matter of business."

And she had thrown herself into the part, and had earned a quiet word of commendation from him.

She was very busy now; there was the costumer to see and the young man who was teaching her the dancing incident to the part; there were her lines to study, and one whole day had been given up to the photographer, who took her picture in all her different costumes and in any variety of poses. Rudolf had told her to do this, although she could not understand why. Lory was helping Ruth all she could, but this afternoon she had declared that her pupil had far outstripped her.

"You're the best ever, kid," she said enthusiastically. "If you strike that gait on the stage, there's nothing to it but fame with a big F for yours."

"I will have to improve a great deal," Ruth answered, "before I will be able to face an audience. I am very weak in some of my lines; I can't seem to get the right inflection."

"Nonsense," retorted Lory. "You don't have

to be a Mary Mannering in a musical show. All you've got to do is to look pretty and show your legs."

"Oh, Lory!"

Lory laughed delightedly. "I knew I could make you blush, but honest, if you sing well and dance gracefully, and—but I won't say it again—the public will be satisfied. That's what they want, and that's what Rudy gives them. That's why he never pulls off a fizzle. You don't catch Rudy trying to elevate the stage. He elevates the skirts of the chorus instead, and has 'em wear black-silk stockings, which cuts a bigger figure at the box-office end."

Ruth was pained. "I don't like to hear you talk that way, Lory. I wish you wouldn't."

Lory laughed. "All right, kid, but it's true, just the same."

There was a question Ruth had been meaning for some time to ask Lory. She decided to broach it now.

"Lory," she asked hesitatingly, "does Mr. Rudolf know that I am married?"

Lory looked up from the book she was reading. "What a funny question! What made you think of that?"

Ruth was embarrassed. "I only thought he ought to know. It doesn't seem quite fair, when

he's been so kind and everything,—" she ended lamely.

"I don't know whether he does or not," answered Lory. "But don't you worry about anything's not being fair to Rudy. He's no spring chicken, kid; he won't tear under the wing."

Ruth said nothing more about it, but she decided that she would tell Rudolf at the first opportunity she could, without her disclosure seeming forced.

Ruth roamed around the room restlessly. She had completed her day's work, for Rudolf had limited her to a certain length of time each day, lest she overtax her strength. Suddenly she seized a sofa cushion and shied it at Lory.

"You're getting to be a regular old bookworm!" she cried merrily. "You've been reading all day. Put on your things and let's go for a walk. It's warm and sunny out."

Lory grumbled at being torn from the yellow-backed novel she was reading, but finally arose, and started to get her hat. Before she reached her room, the bell rang.

"Let's hide," suggested Ruth. "Maybe it's that old woman who was here last week with those tracts."

"I'll tell you a better way. If it's anyone we don't want to see, we'll tell 'em we're just going

to rehearsal. Hurry up and put your hat on! I'll wait a minute before I open the door."

Ruth hastened to obey, but before she was ready she heard Lory's pleased exclamation over the visitor, and knew that there was no need of the deceit. She went back into the room just in time to see a girl, dressed in a heavy winter suit, stroll into the room, mopping her brow with a soiled hand-kerchief. The girl's face was pinched and drawn, and there were heavy circles under her eyes, yet she carried herself jauntily.

"Hello, old scouts!" she cried gayly. "How do you like my costume? Just got it from Worth's. And, when you have gazed your fill on that, let your eyes wander over my jewels. This 'tarara'"—pointing to her bedraggled hat—"cost a cool hundred thousand—stage money—and this rare gem on my lily white finger is worth a king's ransom. It was presented——"

"For Heaven's sake, Madge," remonstrated Lory, "stop that nonsense, and tell me why you are wearing that winter suit on a day like this!"

The girl struck a melodramatic attitude. "Curse ye, Jack Dawson! Ye tore me from me poor old mother's arms, and brought me to the crool city. Look, look, I say, on your work, ere I rend the lying tongue from your dastard throat!"

Both of the other girls laughed. Madge turned

an amazed eye on Ruth, as if she had just seen her for the first time. She advanced and, taking Ruth's hand, dropped to her knee:

"Welcome to our city, fair lady-"

"Will you cut it out, Madge?" cried Lory in exasperation. "Some one must have told you you were funny."

The girl looked aggrieved. "Hast forgot, little one, how in these two brawny arms I carried you from the burning—"

"Come on, Ruth," said Lory in disgust. "Let's go out and leave her to tell it to the wall-paper."

Madge rose and dropped into a chair. The moment she stopped talking, Ruth could see the terrible sadness in her face. She divined that the girl's nonsense had been an alternative for tears.

But, even now, Madge would not give in to her feelings. "Well," she began comically, "I'm all in—down and out—busted! Landlady's attached my trunk, and these are the only rags I have to my name. Last Wednesday—you know, it rained—I started out with this old suit on, thinking I'd save my more radiant robes for sunny weather. That's where I slipped a cog, trying to be economical. I've often noticed that this looking into the future doesn't pay. You dope it out that you're making a clever pass, and the first thing you know Fate gets under your guard just where you didn't ex-

pect. Well, to go on with my hard-luck story, when I returned to my humble abode, I found my trunk gone, and me with not a stitch to wear. Maybe you think it's fun to be trotting around in winter duds on a day like this. Whew! Say, Lory, I wouldn't do it for anyone else, but, if you have any grub around this joint that isn't working, I'll help you get rid of it. Just between friends, I've been so busy counting my money the last few days that I haven't found time to eat." The flush that spread over the girl's face told what it cost her to make the request.

Ruth uttered an exclamation of sympathy. Quick tears sprang to Madge's eyes, but she shook her head savagely, and in a moment was launched on a string of nonsense about the visit she was to make the Astorbilts.

Lory and Ruth bustled around, and soon had a substantial meal prepared. Madge sat down at the table. It was pitiful to see her bolting down the food, though clearly ashamed of her ravenousness. She would lay down her knife and fork and begin to talk, but the lust for food would grip her, and she would seize them and attack the meal with animal-like ferocity. Ruth hurried from the room, unable to keep the tears back, and Lory, thinking that Madge would rather be left alone, promptly followed.

"Ruth, that's the pluckiest kid in this burgh. She's had nothing but hard luck ever since she drifted here from the West. She's supposed to be on the stage, but every time she gets a job the show busts up, or something happens, and then she's had all her rehearsing for nothing. She's tried other things, too, but somehow she can't seem to connect. There's nothing to it, she's a Jonah. But you never hear her squeal. She was half starved when she came in here, but you heard the line of talk she handed out."

"What will she do now?" asked Ruth in deep sympathy.

"God knows! I'll ask her to stay here, but she won't; she's too proud. I've tried to make her take a loan from me over and over again, but she won't do that, either. How she's managed to get along this summer without starving gets me. The worst of it is that there's a man down in Wall Street who would give her anything in the world. She's got a conscience, that's what's the matter. I've told her that she is a fool; I guess she knows it herself, but she has made up her mind that she is going to keep straight, and that's all there is to it."

Ruth was horrified. "But, Lory," she faltered, "you would not want her to---"

"Why not?" demanded Lory fiercely. "She's blamed near starved. Whose fault would it be if

she went crooked? God, I'd like to see some of these good people in her fix!"

"But there must be some other way----"

"Is there?" cried Lory passionately. "That's what the fools who don't know anything about it are always saying. I tell you, Ruth, Madge isn't the only one who has to choose between starvation and that. And starving's easy to talk about, but, when you come down to it, there are sixty minutes in every hour and twenty-four hours in every day, and you don't die the first day, either. If you did, it wouldn't be so bad."

Ruth's answer was forestalled by the reappearance of Madge.

"Pretty good feed you hand out in this shack," she remarked coolly. "Now, if you'll give me a dope stick, I'll put my feet on the table and make believe I'm the Duchess of Marlborough."

Ruth passed over a box of cigarettes. The girl lit one, and inhaled it appreciatively. "First one in two weeks," she said luxuriously. "Say, Lory, whatever became of Nina Royce? Last time I saw her she was in vaudeville. Some one told me afterwards that she had married a mining man from out West somewhere. Did you ever hear anything about it?"

"It seems to me that I did," answered Lory interestedly. "I hope it's true. Nina is a nice kid.

I'll never forget the first time I saw her. It was one amateur night at the Murray Hill. Nina had taken it into her head that she could act Shakespeare. She came on, and tried to do that crazy scene from—what is the name of the play, anyhow? Well, she acted crazy all right, and the crowd didn't do a thing but guy her. But she was game and stuck, until at last they had to pull her off with the hook. The next time I saw her she was in Sherry's with a bunch of actorines and some gay old sports. She was dressed to kill, and had on about a million sparklers. She'd struck it rich somewhere."

The two drifted on, talking about the stage, and Ruth sat silent, her heart filled with sadness. She could not understand how they could talk so unconcernedly with this awful thing hanging over Madge. She tried to think of something she could say, something she could do that would help. She could not.

At last Madge rose. "I'll be jogging along now. Much obliged for the grub—to both of you."

Lory went over to her. "Kid," she said earnestly, "stay here."

The girl's eyes filled. In a moment she was sobbing on Lory's shoulder.

"I can't do it, Lory," she said, as soon as she could speak. "I can't sponge on my friends. I've

reached my limit. You said I would, and I have. God knows I've tried hard, but something was wrong. I've failed. I won't tell even you what I've had to do this summer to get enough to eat. I've done my best. Maybe it wouldn't be some one's else best, but it was mine. Now I'm through," she added bitterly. "I'll try the other game."

She straightened up and forced a smile to her face. "Well, old scouts, good-by and good luck. If you ever bump up against it, come to me. There'll always be something for you."

She nodded cheerfully, and passed out, a pathetic little figure going bravely to meet the fate against which she had struggled for so long in vain.

CHAPTER XVIII

The two weeks had been a period of great import in Benjamin Rudolf's life. His contact with Ruth's pure nature had caused a revulsion of feeling in the man's heart. He looked upon his customary pursuits and companions with distaste, and haunts, which for years had been enlivened by his presence, now knew him no more. Nor had the emotions incited by the dream died down; instead, they had grown stronger day by day, until now he was compelled to admit to himself that he was in love with Ruth.

It was not a pure love—there was nothing ideal about it; Rudolf's life up to this time would preclude anything of the kind; it was a fleshly, passionate love. Yet it was a factor for good, and, as its influence on the man's character became more and more felt, he became more and more dissatisfied with the course upon which he had determined.

The thought of marriage kept intruding in his mind. At first he had put it aside angrily, but it was not to be so easily disposed of, and at last he had come to look upon the idea with something less of abhorrence. The most forceful argument

in favor of this course was the fear which grew up in his heart that, should he choose the other path, Ruth would despise him, and now he longed for her love as he had longed for nothing else in all his life. Had he thought that there was a possibility of gaining it without taking upon himself the bonds of marriage, he would have dismissed all thoughts of this state from his mind with contempt, but a growing knowledge of Ruth's character made him certain that a liaison would be unthinkable to her.

He had no doubt that Ruth would marry him, nor that she would come to love him; his experience with women had been such as to make him supremely confident on this subject. Besides, he viewed everything more or less from a money standpoint, and he was rich. This fact in itself was an almost conclusive argument that he would succeed.

By the end of the two weeks the idea of marriage had fought its way up from a tiny seed, overcoming objection after objection, until now it flourished defiantly.

On a clear, cool afternoon when the summer heat had lessened, and the city was breathing freely again in the refreshing breeze from the northwest, he drove his car up to the curb in front of the apartment on Manhattan Avenue, and gave four

short honks of the horn, a signal previously agreed upon. In a few moments Ruth appeared at the door. She came lightly down the steps and across the sidewalk to the car.

"And how is Sylvia feeling?" he asked as he helped her into the front seat and took his place beside her.

"Fine and dandy," she answered, smiling. This was one of Lory's expressions that Ruth had appropriated.

He looked at her closely. "You do not look quite as well as usual; you look tired," he said anxiously.

"I am a little tired," she confessed. "I did not sleep well last night."

As a matter of fact, Ruth had not slept at all, but lay awake thinking of Madge. She could not get the thought of the girl out of her mind, nor could she forget the sadness in her eyes.

"You are working too hard," he declared. "You must not do it; it is unnecessary. You must take better care of yourself. The first thing you know you will break down." He was plainly worried, and showed it in eyes and voice.

She was touched by his anxiety for her. "Really, I am not," she answered. "I did not sleep very well last night, that is all."

"Are you sure?" he demanded suspiciously.

"You are sure that you are not feeling the strain of the work?"

"Really and truly. Cross my heart," she replied, laughing.

They crossed over to Weehawken on the ferry, and were soon rolling over the splendid roads of New Jersey. There was not a cloud in the sky, and a thunderstorm the night before had washed the dust from the foliage and refreshed it into new life, until it renewed its springtime beauty. The goldenrod made pleasing dashes of yellow against the green, and here and there the sumach lent its flash of red.

Rudolf did not talk much; he was content to enjoy her presence beside him. Never, since he had known her, had he felt the need of her so much. Yes; he would do the right thing—he would not risk her disdain—he would marry her.

He was almost on the point of asking her now, yet something held him back. As in the dream, he felt his own unworthiness. Who was he that he should aspire to a pure woman's love, he who had lived his life a reckless libertine? He felt deadly ashamed, and the remembrance of the words with their implication, which he had spoken to Franklin Morris that night at Morini's, brought a quick red to his cheek.

"Isn't the country beautiful to-day?" she said at

last. "It makes one glad that one's alive, only——" She sighed.

"Only what?" he asked.

"I was just thinking how much sadness there is in the world. I never realized it before I came to New York. Of course people in the country have their troubles and heartaches, but there it is different somehow. Here it is all so pitiless; a human being seems to count for so little, a tiny drop in the ocean. Nobody knows about him, and nobody cares. In the country he would at least have the sympathy of his neighbors, he would be a part of the community, but here—"

He nodded gravely. "The only ones the city has any use for are those out of whom it can get something, and in a way it is logical. The very fact that it is a city shows that it is a center of commercial life, and in a city the size of New York commerce is carried on at top pressure. Every man must exert the whole of his energy in doing his part, whatever it is. He has not the time nor the strength to stop and look after the failures. You would not expect an army on the march to wait for the stragglers."

"But how cruel it is!"

"Undoubtedly; and yet it is merely the specialization of a principle—the principle that it is what a man does, and not what he is, which makes

him valuable to the community. The world has seen the opposite belief tried, and the results were even worse. In the old days, a man's birth determined his place in society. Whether he was worthless or the opposite, did not make any difference, he could go neither up nor down. And, before that, physical strength was the quality which marked out a man's position. Our present system, with all its faults, has this to recommend it—a man can always go up if he has the determination."

"But can he?" she asked earnestly. "Can a man make his own life?"

"I made mine," he answered. "I came to New York a poor boy, without a cent, without education even. I worked. While other young men I knew were going around seeking pleasure and spending their money, I was saving mine and devoting all my time to building a foundation for future success."

"Ah, but don't you see? You had the character to do that. You had the ability. Of course your own efforts helped; I do not deny that. But, if you had not been born with a strong character, your efforts might have gone for nothing."

"Admitting that to be true, what then?"

"I don't know," she answered helplessly. "Sometimes it all seems so wrong. I don't know whether I can explain what I mean, but sometimes

it seems to me that it is not fair to make anyone's ability to get money the test of everything. Some try hard and cannot "—she was thinking of Madge. —" There are many people who seem to lack the ability, and others seem to succeed almost without effort on their part. Then, if everybody had the same chance it would be different, but they haven't."

- "You are a socialist," he said, smiling.
- "Maybe I am. I don't know much about socialism. But it does seem as if, with all the other things civilization has accomplished, it ought to be able to guarantee to every person born into the world at least a living."
 - "It does, if a man is willing to work."
- "Not always. There are a thousand and one things that may prevent a man who is willing and anxious to work from being able to; sickness, injury, for instance. And with women——"
- "A woman has no business to mix in the industrial life at all."
- "How easy that is to say," she returned scornfully. "And yet I agree with you in a way. I did not before I came to New York, but I do now. Women ought never to be placed in a position where they have either to obtain money or starve. Even among savages things are managed better than that."

"What is your remedy for all this?" he asked in amusement. "Would you have the government pension all women, and everyone else who is not fitted to make a living?"

"I don't know," she said sadly. "It is all so terrible. You smile, but it is only because you are so used to the present way that anyone who sees the horror of it seems to you simply foolish. And yet I imagine that, if you had asked one of the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt if it were possible to dispense with slaves, he would have smiled in amusement, and thought you crazy."

"I beg your pardon for smiling," he said quickly, "but it is impossible to change present conditions. If you had your way, and everyone was guaranteed a living, nobody would work. Business would be dead, and we would revert to savagery."

"Just what Pharaoh would have said," she retorted. "He would not have been able to understand that anyone would work without being driven to it by the lash. You cannot imagine anyone's working unless driven to it by the fear of starvation."

"No," he admitted, "I cannot."

"Yet you forget the power of public opinion. As a matter of fact, money in itself is not desired by anyone. It is the increased respect in the eyes of the world for its possessor that makes it striven

for. Nearly all luxury is indulged in for this same reason. If a man was on a desert island, with no neighbors to envy him, I doubt if he would care whether he lived in a castle or a hovel. Much of the so-called luxury is really distasteful to those indulging in it, yet it is a badge of wealth and must be worn to influence the opinion of friends and of the world in general."

"Really," he laughed, with more than amused tolerance, "you almost convince me."

She laughed too. "I am afraid I have been talking a great deal," she said apologetically.

"I have enjoyed hearing your views," he said earnestly. "But I am just old-fashioned enough to believe that, if a man is good for anything, he can get along somehow."

"That is what John used to say, but I know now that he was wrong."

"Who is John?" he asked jealously.

"My husband. Didn't you know---"

The car swerved suddenly, almost striking a stone at the roadside, and the rest of her sentence was lost in a little exclamation of fright. She glanced up to see that Rudolf was as white as death and gasping to get his breath.

"What is the matter?" she cried fearfully.

"Are you sick——"

He forced a smile to his face. "I have a little

trouble with my heart," he muttered. "I am used to these attacks. It will be over in a moment."

He had slowed down the car, and produced a silver-topped flask from his pocket. A few swallows of the whisky brought the color back into his face, but his hand still shook, and he was plainly unstrung.

Gradually he recovered himself, and listened to Ruth's talk of her life in Harbury, with an impassive face. Only once did he venture a remark. It was after Ruth had told him of John's accident and the apparent hopelessness of his case.

"You should obtain a divorce," he said. "It is not right that you should be tied to a man like that for life."

The expression of horror in her eyes warned him that he had made a false step.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I would never think of such a thing."

It was characteristic of the man that Rudolf did not shorten the drive, although every minute was agony to him. He purposely drove farther than he had intended, and the lights were twinkling in the streets of Manhattan when he set Ruth down at her door.

"I am worried about you," she said anxiously on parting. "You were warning me to-day against working too hard. I am sure it is you who do that,

not I. Won't you promise to take a rest? I wish you would. Please!" She looked up into his eyes, her own shadowed with concern.

A great bitterness welled up in his heart. How sweet her solicitude would have been under other conditions. Now it was torture to him.

He made a vague reply, and, entering the car, threw the clutch in with a jerk. The car sprang forward as a horse under the spur. Rudolf drove recklessly to the garage. He wanted to get away from the thoughts which tortured him. Now that he knew he could not marry Ruth, he held the conviction that it had been his intention from the first.

As he strode away from the garage, a thought struck him.

"God!" he muttered. "The only decent thing I ever wanted to do in my life, and I can't do it!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE first rehearsal of "The Parisian Milliner" was a trying ordeal to Ruth. Tessie Darlington had not yet returned from her summer home, and the regular understudy was absent—no one but Rudolf knew why—so Ruth was called upon to take the part of Sylvia.

The bare stage and the dark house oppressed her, and the actors and actresses in their street clothes gave the whole affair an effect of childishness and unreality. In costume, with the lights, and the music of the orchestra, "The Parisian Milliner" would doubtless be entertaining, but without the atmosphere created by these embellishments it was hopelessly dull. The remarks, supposedly witty, fell flat, and the lines which were meant to be "spicy" became merely vulgar. The songs alone retained anything of their natural effectiveness, and even they were marred by the general depression.

Ruth was very nervous at first, and trembled lest the stage manager turn on her the flow of sarcasm which he launched at the other people in the cast, outbursts which, to tell the truth, seemed to affect them very little, if at all. He refrained, and, when

he did have occasion to address a remark to her, did so in a quiet, respectful manner. Ruth was grateful to him for his consideration, but the gratitude was misplaced, and should have gone to Rudolf, who had given explicit orders concerning this matter. As the rehearsal proceeded, however, she gained courage. She could not help knowing that she was doing well; she intercepted admiring glances, and overheard stray bits of conversation which, though often tinged with jealousy, heartened her.

Indeed, Ruth was a puzzle to the others. They had not even heard of her before, and that a stranger should come among them, and at a rehearsal give a creditable performance of the leading part, filled them with wonder. Who was she? Where had Rudolf picked her up? Was she to be the star? Where was Tessie Darlington? These were some of the questions they whispered among themselves, questions which no one could answer.

Rudolf sat in a box and looked on, smiling quietly. He was satisfied; he knew that his intuition had been once more justified. Once he caught her eye, and patted his hands together in a pantomime of approval. She smiled back at him happily.

Sam Andrews had come to sneer, but remained to worship. "I wonder if Bennie has got second sight," he said to himself. "I bet she will make

a better Sylvia than Tessie. She's a crackerjack, all right!"

Then he began to worry. "I hope Tessie doesn't change her mind and want to come back. We've got her letter locked up in the safe all right enough. Still she might cook up a case somehow—enough of a one to make a lot of trouble."

He dilated on this fear until it assumed ugly proportions. Then he took it to Rudolf, who merely laughed, and thus doubled Sam's fears, already gigantic.

The rehearsal was long and tedious. Ruth was very tired when it was over. But she was happy; she felt that she had done well. She was a little disappointed, though, that Rudolf had not congratulated her. Toward the end of the rehearsal he had gone out, and had not returned. She wondered why he had not taken the time to speak to her before he went. She said as much to Lory as they were walking home, and added:

- "I hope he was satisfied."
- "Don't worry, kid; you've got Tessie Darlington tied to a post. If Rudy is wise, he'll give you the part year after this. You're slick in it."
- "Do you mean that you really think there is a chance of that?"
- "Sure I do. I'll bet he will, too. How would you like that?"

"Why don't you ask me how I would like to have a million dollars?" laughed Ruth.

Lory lost herself in a brown study. "Say, Ruth," she said at last, "did you notice that kid on the end of the chorus—the little one in a brown dress?"

"The little thin one? Yes. What about her?"

"Well, say, just speak to her once in a while, will you? She's up against hard luck. I was talking to her, and, honest, I don't believe she's had enough to eat for a month. She'll appreciate it if you talk to her a little; she's sort of down in the mouth. Her name's Mamie Roberts."

"Why, of course I will. I'll look for her tomorrow. I'm glad you told me about her. I noticed that she looked as if she was feeling blue," Ruth answered. Then she looked up slyly at Lory. "How much did you lend her?" she asked.

Lory blushed. "Why, I offered her some money, but she didn't want to take it. She said she could get along all right till the show began. It's a shame that they don't pay a girl while she's rehearsing. I think it's——" Lory was working herself into a state of righteous indignation.

"I know," interrupted Ruth, "but you didn't answer my question." She loved to catch Lory in some of her charities, and watch her squirm under the exposure.

"Well, I loaned her ten dollars, if you've got to

know, but she will pay it back when she gets her salary. I had to give her something, didn't I?" she demanded belligerently. "I couldn't see the poor kid starve, could I?"

"No, of course you couldn't, you dear old angel. If it had been your last ten dollars, you would have been unable to resist the temptation. But what surprises me is that you have escaped becoming a Sister of Charity."

Lory grimaced. "I'd look nice in the duds they wear, wouldn't I?"

Rudolf and Jack came in together after dinner.

Ruth could not wait. "Did I do well?" she asked Rudolf almost before he was inside the door.

"Indeed you did," he answered gravely; "so well, in fact, that you have enabled me to come to a decision; you will play the part of Sylvia this coming season."

"Is this a joke, Rudy?" demanded Jack sharply.

"Rudy!" exclaimed Lory breathlessly.

Ruth stood speechless.

"No," he answered, smiling, "I am not joking. Tessie Darlington has asked to be released from her contract. She intends to commit matrimony again—this is her fourth venture, I believe—and this time she wishes to retire from the stage. From the first moment I met Miss Lawson I realized that

she would make a charming Sylvia, and had it in mind that, after a year or two of training, we would create a similar part for her. Tessie's ambition again to become a helpmate forced my hand. Miss Lawson's ability, however, is unquestioned, and I do not regret the change. In fact, I believe that she will make the play a much greater success than Tessie could."

Ruth could hardly believe her ears. She sat down and tried to comprehend her good fortune. It had flashed upon her so suddenly as to leave her dazed. She answered the congratulations of the others as in a dream.

"Just think of it, kid," cried Lory excitedly, "you will have your name stuck up on all the bill-boards, and your picture will be a blot on the land-scape wherever we poor ordinary mortals look. When will you have the bills out, Rudy?"

"They are all ready," he answered. "To-night, even now, the billposters are at work. I only waited for the rehearsal to make sure."

"You believed in me as much as that?" asked Ruth in a tone of wonder.

"I knew you could do it," he replied.

"Gad!" said Jack to Lory in a low tone, "Rudy is playing the game with high stakes."

She nodded. "What do you think about it now? Weren't we right not to butt in?"

"If it were anyone but Ruth, I should say we were. As it is——" He shook his head doubtfully.

Lory uttered an exclamation of impatience. "But think what it means—everything!"

"Oh, well—I don't see how we could have done any differently. Let's not think about it."

"There's no use," she agreed; "it's past us now, anyway."

The conversation became general for awhile, the talk running on plays and players, on successes old and new, on stars who shone for a brief time on Broadway, and then faded away into oblivion, and of others who were still enjoying the public's favor.

Ruth listened interestedly to the talk of the life which was now to be hers, but through the happiness with which her heart was filled, ran a vein of sorrow; she wished that John could be here to enjoy her triumph; it seemed almost a sin to be so happy when he was in such a pitiable condition. Then, with the opportunity had come responsibility: she feared that she might not be able to measure up to Rudolf's expectations. When she had to face an audience she might not do so well as she had at rehearsal.

Finally Lory rose, and went to the piano. "An imitation of Miss Ruth Lawson," she announced

in the manner of the vaudeville stage, "in her success, 'The Parisian Milliner'!"

She struck a few chords, and swung into the Violet song, mimicking Ruth to the life, adding just enough burlesque to make the thing funny.

In the laughter that followed, Rudolf turned to Ruth.

"You see, Sylvia, what it is to be famous. You are being imitated already. By the way, you must get up early to-morrow morning and look out of the window. There is a bill-board across the street. I told them to be sure to get to it to-night."

"I'll be up at daylight," she replied, laughing. "Do you hear that, Lory? To-morrow morning I am to see my name in print for the first time. I feel very important. If there isn't a crowd collected gazing up at it reverently, I shall be disappointed."

"If you're so keen about the crowd," said Jack, "I'll collect one myself and we'll all stand around in attitudes of veneration."

"What-at daylight-you?"

"That's so," he replied, laughing. "I didn't think about that clause in the contract. All bets are off. I like you, Ruth, but not enough to get out of bed at such an unseemly hour. However, Rudy can take my place."

"I beg to be excused," said Rudolf, "but I'll tell

you what I will do. I'll telephone for my car now, and we'll go for a drive. It's moonlight, you know. If Sylvia wants to, we'll manage to pass by some of the billboards which have already been adorned. There's a squad of men working up on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street."

"I suppose it is awfully silly of me," said Ruth, "but I really have a wild desire to see how my name looks."

"Nothing silly about that," said Lory. "Why, the first time I saw my name on a programme, I was so crazy that I got a lot of them, and hung them up on the wall, where I could read 'em first thing every morning."

"I never did quite that," remarked Rudolf, "but the first time 'Rudolf and Andrews present——' appeared on a board, I followed the billposters around, under pretense of seeing that the job was done correctly, just to exult in my importance. The joke of it was, that Sam was doing the same thing, giving the same excuse that I was. It wasn't until about five years later that we admitted to each other the truth."

"You have a big undertaking on your hands, Rudolf," said Jack, when the girls had left the room to prepare for the ride. "Do you think you can make the public stand for an unknown actress?"

"I think so," replied the other easily.

"Well, I hope she'll make a hit. She's a mighty fine little girl, Rudy. I'd hate to see her disappointed. I think," he went on deliberately, "that any man who didn't run straight with a little innocent thing like she is, ought to be shot." He looked narrowly at the other.

"I think so, too," answered Rudolf in a low tone.

They were interrupted by the reappearance of the girls. Ten minutes later the car drew up in front of the door, and they all clambered in as merry as a group of children.

They drove up Manhattan Avenue, and turned into One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, and there, near the corner, under an electric light, was the vanguard of fame.

At the sight of the big, white letters on the blue background, Ruth's heart gave a leap. She fastened her eyes on the poster, and, as the car went slowly by, the letters seemed to burn themselves into her brain.

In one second, she seemed to see all that they represented. She seemed to see her future stretching out pleasantly before her. There would be wealth and fame and luxury and happiness. And then a new thought leaped into her mind—she would have the best surgical attention for John. Somewhere in the world there must be a surgeon who

could perform an operation and cure him. She spoke to Rudolf about it.

"Do you think it might be done?" she asked.

He hesitated a moment before replying. "Yes," he said at last in a strained voice. "I think it might be done."

She was very quiet during the rest of the drive, thinking of this new possibility.

CHAPTER XX

RUTH was hurrying up Broadway, her mind filled with turmoil. She had just left Rudolf's office, where she had made a terrible discovery. During her conversation with Rudolf, Jack Marshall had come in, and in the subsequent talk between the two men it developed that Jack Marshall was a married man. Just how this fact had been disclosed, Ruth could not remember; only two things stood out clearly in her mind: Jack was married, and she must tell Lory. Ruth had escaped from the office without even waiting to excuse herself. Now she was trying to decide what to do—how to tell Lory. She shrank from inflicting this blow on her friend, yet she realized that she must.

She turned the corner of Forty-second Street toward the elevated, and her steps became slower.

"How can I ever tell her?" she moaned. "Poor Lory, poor, poor Lory."

Then a sudden anger against Jack swept over her. How could a man be so base as to win a girl's love when he had not the right to marry her? Wonder filled her mind that a man like Jack could do such a thing. True, she had thought him a little too easy-going, but that he would descend to downright villainy was beyond her comprehension. It seemed incredible.

The worst of it was that Ruth was sure that Lory loved him devotedly. Lory never talked much about her love, but she showed it in a hundred different ways—her deference to his wishes, her anxiety for his comfort, and her eagerness to please him in her dress. And, Ruth had always thought, Jack returned the love. He was at the house as much as he could be, and seemed happy in her company. It seemed impossible that he had been deceiving her all the time.

Ruth mounted the steps to the station wearily. "Poor Lory!" she kept saying over and over to herself. "Poor, poor Lory!"

As the train swept her rapidly uptown, her courage ebbed away. How could she tell Lory? How could she bear to see the happiness die out of her friend's face, to be replaced by utter misery? For an instant she was tempted not to tell her. Maybe it would be better to let Jack know that she had discovered his secret, and force him to break with Lory gradually, but in the moment of its conception she knew that the plan was weak, that it would be no kindness to Lory to have the pain long drawn out. She must tell her at once; it was her duty.

Yet, as Ruth descended to the street after leav-

ing the train, another attack of cowardice made her turn west toward Riverside Drive. She walked irresolutely for several blocks before she could force herself to turn and go toward the apartment.

Lory had developed an infrequent longing for cleanliness that morning, and when Ruth reached home she found her engaged in vigorously scrubbing the kitchen floor. Lory glanced up and, at the sight of Ruth's drawn face, sprang to her feet.

- "What is it?" she cried. "Rudy hasn't--"
- "No, no!" faltered Ruth. "It's—it's about—Jack."
 - " Tack! Is he hurt?"
- "No," answered Ruth, striving to gather her courage together. "Oh, Lory dear! how can I tell you? You poor, poor child!"

Lory stared at her. "Well?" she said impatiently.

Ruth went over and put her arm around the other. "Try to bear it bravely, dear heart. Lory, he's—married!"

A moment passed, and Ruth strained the other girl to her breast, murmuring sympathetic, endearing phrases.

Suddenly Lory burst into wild, hysterical laughter that grated on Ruth's ears like the clash of metal. She endeavored to quiet her, but Lory pushed her aside, and darted into her room, locking herself

in. In vain Ruth knocked on the door, and called to her friend; Lory would not let her in.

Ruth turned drearily to the window, and stood staring out. The day which she had thought so perfect that morning now seemed dark and gloomy; the very people passing in the street below moved as if oppressed with grief. She reproached herself for not having broken the news to Lory in a more gentle way.

"I should have led up to it more gradually," she told herself.

Ruth felt her friend's grief as keenly as if it had been her own. She suffered intensely. seemed as if this terrible thing had struck into her very heart. She sank into a chair and wondered what she had better do now. With Lory, desperate and stricken, locked in her room—there might be a tragedy. She sprang up and went to the 'phone. She would telephone Rudolf. Maybe he could help her. Then the thought struck her that Rudolf had known that Jack was married-must have known it, and had kept silent, had pretended to be a friend of Lory's, and yet had let her remain in ignorance. Ruth was staggered to think of such treachery. She turned away from the 'phone, and looked uncertainly around the room, trying to decide on some course to pursue.

At that moment Lory entered. She had on her

hat and gloves. A sudden fear that she was going to find Jack—would perhaps do something rash, gripped Ruth. An exclamation of protest sprang to her lips, but Lory began to speak.

"You must excuse me, Ruth, for laughing," she said in a low tone, "but, if you could have seen your face!" Her lips twitched, but she controlled herself with an effort and went on:

"You see, dear, I knew that Jack was married—I have always known it."

Ruth could find no words.

"You have made a mistake about our relations, Jack's and mine. At times I have thought that you had guessed. At other times I thought you had not, and knew that I ought to tell you. It has not been a fair deal to keep you in ignorance. Yet I did it with the best of intentions. But now it is your right to know. Ruth, I am Jack's mistress."

There was silence in the room. The clock on the mantel ticked loudly, its puny noise sounding like the blows of a hammer in the tense stillness. Ruth's mind was trying to comprehend Lory's words, trying to adjust itself to the awful disclosure. That this good, sweet girl, Lory, who was so kind to everybody, who had been so kind to her, should not be a good woman,—no, it could not be, it was not to be believed!

"I am not ashamed of it," went on Lory with

a trace of defiance in her voice. "It began when I was sixteen years old, not with Jack, with another man. I did not choose such a life. I despise men. If I had been rich, I would not have even married. I tried to make a living, and failed. I worked in a department store for three dollars and a half a week as a cash girl. You know how far that goes in New York. Then I tried for the stage. I met with promises, and nothing else. I rehearsed for weeks without pay, only to find that at the end I was thrown out. At last I knew why; I had no pull. There was only one way for me to get a pull, and I took it. I am not saying that every girl who goes on the stage has to do what I did. I don't know. I only know that in my case it was that way or none at all, so I gave in. It wasn't easy—give me credit for that, Ruth—I nearly cried my eyes out, but I got used to it. The man was good to me, and gave me everything I wanted, and helped me to get a good position on the stage. After that I might have broken away and kept straight, I suppose, but I'd gotten used to comforts. Besides. I had a bad name. It isn't easy for a woman to reform, Ruth."

She paused a moment and, as Ruth did not speak, went on:

"I met Jack about a year ago. We like each other. I do everything to please him, and he is

good to me. We do not love each other—as you understand love—but we are happy when we are together. His wife does not love him. She even knows about this-not who the woman is. but that there is somebody. She does not care. She married him for money, and, as long as he gives her all she wants, she is satisfied. She did not love him even before they were married; she was in love with another man, but because Jack was rich she married him." Lory laughed hardly. "I really can't see much difference between us, only that she sold herself to him, and then cheated him. And she had no excuse, for she was rich already, while I-but I am not trying to make myself out good, because I am not. I only wanted you to know just how it happened that I got into this sort of thing.

"Now, kid," she continued kindly, "I have told you everything. I am going out for a walk now, and when I come back you can tell me what you want to do. I would like this to make no difference between us, but maybe you cannot feel that way about it. If you want to stay here, I will be very glad—more than I can tell you—but, if you feel that you can't, why, there will be no hard feelings, only"—there was a trace of wistfulness in her voice—"don't think any worse of me than you can help." Before Ruth could speak she was gone.

Ruth sat with her hands in her lap, staring at

the carpet. She was face to face with the shadow that hung like a pall over this horrible city. She had seen it from afar when she had been seeking work that first month in New York: it drew nearer when she heard of it from Madge's lips; and now Lory had brought it to her very door. Lory had confessed that she was not a good woman, that she was one of the class which Ruth had been taught to look upon as outcasts, to think of with contempt and abhorrence. Yet she could not think of Lory thus; she could not despise her. Why was it? Was she herself lacking in moral perception; was she, too, really bad at heart, or were all those other people wrong, who had declared that this one sin, no matter how caused, should be the line of demarcation between a good woman and a bad, between a woman worthy of the respect and the reverence which womanhood inspires and a woman who is lower than the worst male criminal?

She sighed helplessly; she could not reason it out, but her love for Lory cried out to her that it was not Lory who was to blame, but the conditions that had forced her into such a life against her will. Lory had been sorely tempted, and had yielded; the temptation had been too strong. It might not have conquered a stronger character—Ruth could not know whether it would have or not—but Lory had probably struggled against it

with all the force of her nature, and the wisdom of her sixteen years, and yet she had succumbed.

The story which Lory had told Ruth so calmly was one which should have brought tears to the eyes of both the victim and the hearer, yet it had not. Ruth vaguely wondered why it had not. Was it because it was so commonplace? Or was the whole world, herself and Lory included, so utterly hypocritical as to hold up its hands in horror only when it suited it to? In this connection, she remembered a song she had heard sung at the theater a few nights before.

The comedian had hinted, in words which the most unsophisticated could not fail to understand, at an infraction of the seventh commandment; and the audience had roared with laughter, and had demanded an encore. Was it funny or was it vile? Were the audience right in being amused, or should they have left the house in a body? If they were ready to punish so severely a woman who broke the same commandment, then, Ruth decided, they should not have laughed.

From thinking of Lory, Ruth passed on to Madge, then to those thousands of other women who, like them, had been driven into such a mode of living by conditions over which they had little or no control, and, having entered, could not get out again. Of course they could, if certain other

conditions arrayed themselves on their side, but the fact remained that the number of women who did reform was very small. Ruth had once seen a rat in a trap, and a group of men and boys were poking sticks through the wires to torture it. She had remonstrated with them, and the man who was holding the trap defended their action by saying, "Serves the varmint right for bein' such a fool as to get in there." Was not this the attitude of the world toward fallen women? Did it not, by its whole social and commercial system, set a trap for them, and then, once they had entered, consider that nothing could be too bad for them, no scorn too bitter, no hate too venomous?

An hour passed. Ruth sat without moving, or lifting her eyes from the floor, and at the end of that time she decided. She would not judge. She would not condemn. She would only pity and love. Yes, that was it; that was what Lory was deserving of, what Madge and all those others needed, the two things which they never received, the only things which could help them, could make them better—pity and love.

CHAPTER XXI

THE second week in September was ushered in by a heavy rainstorm, which held the city in its down-pour for three days. The leaden skies were filled with clouds, fast scurrying from the northeast, and the raw, chilly wind struck into the marrow. Bitter invectives against the weather were heard on every side. Yet this condition had one advantage; it opened a topic of conversation on which everyone could agree; business, political, religious antagonists united harmoniously in cursing the weather.

Ruth was happy; she was tasting the first fruits of success, and they were sweet. Every time she saw her name on a billboard, or came across one of many press notices that Rudolf was constantly inserting, her heart thrilled with an exultant joy. At first, she was troubled because the articles about her were not true, but she was reassured by Rudolf's argument that no one was deceived by them, but only interested, and that it was a form of advertising indulged in by practically all of the profession. So she came to laugh heartily when, one Sunday, the entire front page of the colored supplement of a certain yellow journal was devoted

to a story of her life, of which not one item was true.

"The Parisian Milliner" was rapidly rounding into shape. Out of the chaos of the first rehearsal had come order. Ruth's work had constantly improved until Rudolf looked forward to the opening night, now but a day off, with certainty. Tessie Darlington had gone light-heartedly to the altar. not, however, without some jealousy of her suc-Ruth was working very hard, yet there cessor. were many diversions, and these she now, in her light-hearted state, thoroughly enjoyed. There were dinners at Sherry's or Morini's, night automobile rides, when she and Lory, Rudolf and Jack made trips out into the country, returning sometimes at daybreak. There were excursions to Sheepshead Bay or Belmont Park to watch the races. once they had all gone to Coney Island, and ridden on everything, tried everything, with the enthusiasm of a group of children.

Ruth was now living at one of the newer and most expensive hotels in Manhattan. Rudolf had insisted that this was a form of advertising that paid well, and he also insisted on her supplying herself liberally with clothes, for which he paid, and charged up also to advertising. Ruth had insisted that all this expense should be later deducted from her salary. He had protested, but she was

firm, and he had to acquiesce. About this time, he bought a new car, a limousine, and placed it, in charge of a chauffeur, at her disposal. It was all like a dream, a beautiful fairy story. She was showered with all the luxuries, the delights of life, and as yet had done nothing to merit them.

The news from Harbury was the same. John was no better and no worse. Ruth had thought that in some of his mother's letters she detected an undertone of worry, and had written asking if she were in need of money. This was the one thing which Ruth did not have. Her salary would not begin until the play opened, and she had steadfastly refused Rudolf's offers of loans under the form of an advance. She often went for days without a dollar in her purse, but, as everything was paid for, she had little need of money. John's mother had written back, saying that she had enough to last until Ruth's salary began, and now that time was almost at hand. Ruth had planned to have John and his mother move back into the old house, and much of her time was given up to devising schemes for their comfort. She had had one bitter disappointment. She had met a surgeon who bore an international reputation, and, in the course of a conversation with him, had told him about John's case. He had given her no hope that an operation would be successful. For some days after this had depressed her, but, as she had really not given herself up greatly to hope, the disappointment was less than it might have been, and her busy days left little time for useless regret.

In all this time, Ruth was constantly meeting people who entertained an extremely lenient view of life, and who lived by a lax code of morals. Lory's disclosure of her relations with Jack had opened Ruth's eyes, and she saw and understood far more than she would have before. If she had ever been the least bit inclined toward intolerance, at any rate she was not now, but, although she looked upon the sins of others with pity rather than scorn, she still held for herself the same rigid moral code which she had held in Harbury.

From all this observation of life, she had come to realize that Rudolf's attitude toward her was exceptional. Never had he said one word to her which John might not have heard with complacency of mind. And a feeling akin to love grew up in her heart for him. There was nothing of passion in this love; it was rather the affection a sister would feel for an older brother, but under its sway she adopted an attitude of affection toward the man, little realizing what torture it constantly was to him.

Benjamin Rudolf was harried by conflicting emotions. His discovery that Ruth was married had

awakened all the evil in the man. The love which had been a factor for good now became a factor for bad, and vet the better part of his nature, which had been aroused by the dream and by Ruth's influence, was combating the evil sturdily. in a state of vacillation; one day he would decide to carry out his original intention, the next he was equally determined to play the honorable part. Even the hours, the minutes, the seconds would reverse his decision. Sometimes a glance from her eves, a chance touch of her hand would drive him into a frenzy of passion, and then, at some sweet seriousness of hers, his passion would die out to ashes, leaving him sick and ashamed. The strain was telling on him; he was thinner, and his face had, at times, a haggard look. Ruth laid the change to the work incidental to whipping the play into shape, and knew nothing of the struggle going on in the man's soul.

As she came off the stage on Tuesday afternoon—the play was to open the next night—she found Rudolf waiting for her.

"Only one day more," he said cheerfully, "and then you will dazzle the public."

A sudden mistrust of herself swept over her. "What if I should fail!" she cried, turning white.

"You will not fail," he answered confidently.

"But it will be hard to live up to the reputation

you have given me," she protested. "If the public is disappointed——"

"In this case, the public will not be disappointed. You are all that I have claimed for you, and more. But, even if you were not, the public would think vou were. There is not one in a thousand of an audience who has an opinion of his own: he comes to the theater prejudiced either for or against It makes no difference whether the an actor. actor is good or bad, the result is the same. I could tell you of dozens of cases where stars have been made simply by bluff,—that is, advertising, and have continued to live on their reputations for years. But in your case we do not need to bluff. I have told the public that you are the daintiest comédienne on the stage, and you are. I have said that your voice is far beyond the average heard in light opera, and that you are beautiful. It is all true."

His encouragement restored her self-belief.

She laughed. "Rudy," she cried—she had gradually dropped into the habit of calling him by the nickname which all his friends used—"I fear you are becoming a flatterer."

He smiled. "And flattery, I believe, is labeled a sin. Wasn't it Dante who pictured a special section in the undesirable portion of the next world reserved for those who pursue that vice? So I suppose you are denouncing me as a sinner."

- "Precisely. I can see a place in that special section yawning for Benjamin Rudolf. But do you really think I will do all right?" wistfully.
- "I refuse to answer. You forfeited your chance of hearing any further praise from my lips when you maligned me in such a cruel fashion."
- "You score!" she laughed. "And now what are you going to do about Mamie Roberts? Are you going to give her a song in the second act?"
 - "The second act has enough songs now."
- "Please do, Rudy. She has worked so hard, and she has a good voice."
- "If you insist, I suppose I will have to," he grumbled.
- "Thank you," she smiled. "And now about the other matter—the rocking-chairs?"
- "I have already made arrangements for them. It was a good suggestion."
 - "I think so."
- "There is no doubt about your being a full-fledged actress; you have begun to bulldoze your manager. Mamie Roberts ought to be thankful, for I am letting her sing only because I have to."
- "Where is your boasted intuition?" she rallied.

 "Now I have enough to know that she will make a hit, especially if you give her that ingénue song, which I like. Why don't you let her sing that one?"

"Oh! go ahead," he answered in pretended annoyance; "suit yourself. Upset everything, and spoil the whole play. Don't mind me, I'm only the manager, you know."

She laughed merrily. "What a bear you could be if you tried. You have the makings of an ideal tyrant, or a pirate—yes, that is it; when you frown, you look just like a pirate."

"If I were a pirate," he answered, "I think I should be tempted to steal you and carry you off to a desert island."

"You—on a desert island?" she jeered. "Remember, there would be no Broadway, no clubs, no champagne. Rudy, I fear that you would not be happy."

"I would-with you." His tone was serious.

She looked up at him quickly, and was startled by the expression in his eyes. But he instantly looked away, and remarked lightly:

"However, I guess I'll stay in New York for a while longer."

The conversation turned on the play, and Ruth forgot all about the incident.

After Rudolf had left Ruth at her hotel, he walked back to his office, his head sunk on his breast.

"I nearly did it that time," he muttered.

CHAPTER XXII

THE orchestra was playing the overture.

The crowded house breathed with an air of expectancy. For weeks Sylvia, the daintiest, most bewitching Sylvia, had smiled down at them from the billboards, or laughed at them from the cards in the subway or on the elevated. Over in New Jersey, commuters had formed the habit of looking up from their papers to catch a glimpse of her on the signs along the meadows, and promise themselves that, when the play opened, they would go to see her in the life.

As Rudolf had predicted, the public was overwhelmed with curiosity. The seats for the entire first week had been sold out ten days before the opening. The whole city knew of Ruth Lawson. An actor in vaudeville could count on always winning a round of applause by a casual mention of her name, for a New York audience likes to hear an allusion to some person about whom they know; it gives them a sense of superiority. They say to themselves with slangy complacence, "I'm in on that one," and look at their neighbors to see if they are equal in knowledge.

Behind the scenes all was tension. The last rehearsal had gone badly. The stage manager was hoarse from voicing his disgust. The principals had acted like sticks; the chorus had danced like wooden dummies. Sam Andrews had already decided that the play would be a failure, and was planning how to recoup the loss. His face wore an expression of deepest melancholy, and, when Rudolf rallied him about it, he sank to even greater depths of sorrow and made predictions with the enthusiasm of a Cassandra. Rudolf alone was not worried. He had seen so many first nights, and it was always the same story. He knew that the poor rehearsal was due to the fact that the company was tired out, but he also knew that, on the rise of the curtain, it would be electrified into new life. He believed in the play, he believed in the company which he had selected, and he had an abiding faith in his good luck. He had never yet put on a failure, and he was not losing his grip—not vet.

Ruth stood alone in the wings; Rudolf had left her for a moment to give a few final directions. She was twining her fingers nervously together. The time had come. For weeks she had been looking forward to this moment, and wondering how she would feel. Now that it had come, she could hardly realize it. Everything seemed unreal. She

saw the other people in the cast hurrying to and fro, and the stage-hands giving the last touches to the scenery, as if they and she were part of a dream. The property man, hurrying by, spoke to her, and wished her luck. She nodded absently. Then suddenly it came to her with the force of a In a moment the curtain would go up on a scene in a little millinery shop. The chorus would sing a song, and dance. Then they would sit down in rocking-chairs—the rocking-chairs which she had suggested-and rock gently back and forth in time to a lilting measure which the orchestra would be playing softly. And then—she gasped—then Sylvia would enter carrying a lavender hat-box tied with a big bow of white ribbon. She would be softly humming to herself the air which the orchestra was playing. Advancing to the footlights, she would sing. What if her voice should break! What if she should forget the words! She tried to think of them now, but could not. The perspiration broke out upon her brow. If she could only run away from it all! How foolish she had been to think that she could stand up and sing before all those people! Then the voice of Rudolf, in conference with the stage manager, reached her ears. He was talking calmly. The fact reassured her. Rudolf believed that she would do all right, and he ought to know. Gradually her heart stopped

its thumping, and she began to feel more confident.

Rudolf finished his conversation and came over to her.

"Well, Sylvia?" he said lightly.

"I'm afraid I'm awfully nervous. Oh, Rudy! what if I should fail?"

It was the same old cry, the longing for encouragement. She had said it a hundred times, and this time his answer was as always:

"You will not fail."

She smiled up at him. "You are very good. I must tire you with my foolishness."

"Nothing you do ever tires me, Sylvia, and, if you should go out there"—he waved his hand toward the stage—"and fail utterly, it would make no difference to me. Sylvia—I——"He checked himself suddenly.

"There is no such thing as your failing," he went on in a different tone. "There are no more people in the audience now than there were at the dress rehearsal. I purposely filled the house then so that you would not have to face an audience for the first time to-night. I asked men about you, men who have been connected with the stage for years, men who know, who were anxious to challenge my judgment. They all told me what I knew already. Sylvia, you are a success. When you go on, the crowd will go wild at the sight of you. Re-

member what I say," he went on laughingly, "before you reach the footlights you will have to bow your thanks."

Rudolf was not attempting prophecy. He had undertaken that enough of his friends—with instructions—were scattered through the house to start the applause upon which he relied to remove all chances of stage fright.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed suddenly, "there goes the curtain."

She listened breathlessly to the chorus galloping through the opening number, then came the patter of their feet in the dance. A slight clapping of hands followed, and then—then began the melody that was her cue.

Rudolf seized her hand. "Remember," he said earnestly, "I believe in you, Sylvia."

The audience craned in an expectant hush. The orchestra played softly while the chorus rocked slowly back and forth in the little wicker rocking-chairs. A few in the audience exchanged glances of appreciation at this innovation. But their eyes quickly turned back to the stage. In a moment they would see the girl who had been elevated to fame almost in a night, the girl who, without backing, without experience, had induced the keenest manager in America to give her the leading part in a Broadway production.

Slowly a door at the back of the millinery shop opened, and through it appeared—Sylvia. A murmur of pleasure swept over the house. For once the advertisements had spoken the truth; a daintier, a more appealing picture than she made in her simple white dress, with her curls peeping out from under her big lace hat, they had never seen. Just inside the door, she stopped, and, with a little frown of vexation, stooped to arrange the bow which was a little crooked.

It was so naturally done, so artistic, that it hid the art. Rudolf's friends were waiting, as he had directed, for her to get halfway down the stage, so it was not they who started the applause that fairly shook the house. Sylvia looked up in surprise. Her fixing the bow was not part of the play. In one of those flashes of thought which in moments of tenseness show up some little thing out of all proportion, she had noticed that the bow was crooked and feared that it would spoil everything. At the look of surprise, and the sight of her big brown eyes, the house redoubled its clamor of delight. Without speaking a line, without singing a note, Sylvia had made her hit.

She was not a bit afraid now of the friendly people out there in front. She advanced with a smile of happiness on her face, and sang—sang as she had done only twice in her life before.

And now the audience was not only pleased, but filled with a vast respect and admiration. At the end of the first verse, she could hardly go on for the uproar, but stood smiling and dimpling in the most deliciously childlike way.

And, as the play went on, the wave of success mounted higher and higher. Rudolf, watching from the wings, saw his wildest hopes fulfilled. Sam Andrews was in a ferment of anxiety lest something happened that they lose her. Sylvia was intoxicated with happiness.

At the end of the second act, the audience demanded a speech.

- "Go out and talk to them, Sylvia," laughed Rudolf. "You might as well, first as last, for they will hold up the play all night unless you do."
- "Oh, I can't!" she cried in dismay. "I don't know what to say."
 - "Say anything."
 - "I can't."
- "You must," he answered. "The public demands it." He laughed.
 - "Tell me what to say, then; quick, Rudy!"
- "How do I know what to say?" he retorted.
 "I'm not a footlight favorite. I'd probably tell you the wrong thing."
 - "Please, Rudy."

But he refused. He was enjoying her discom-

fiture, and he knew that the audience would enjoy it. Anything she did now would be looked upon with the greatest delight.

The audience were wearing out their gloves in frantic demand for Sylvia to make a speech to them. At last she came out with a frightened look on her face. The noise ceased instantly. She stood hesitating.

"I thank you," she began in a quavering voice, "very much." She seemed about to say more, but suddenly turned and fled into the wings.

The audience were immensely tickled; it was so refreshing, it pleased them to think that, while they were lost in admiration for her, she was really afraid of them. It was a new sensation. "She doesn't seem a bit like an actress," they said delightedly to one another, intending the highest compliment.

Yet after all it was with the critics, the newspaper men, that Ruth's fate lay, but not in their ranks either was there any defection.

"By Jove!" said Addison of *The Star* to Porter of *The Record*, during the second intermission, "Rudolf has made a find this time. I came here to-night to roast this play to the limit. I was going to head my article, 'Amateur Night at the Antwerp,' but she's taken me into camp without a shot fired. Porter, she's going to set New York crazy."

"Yes," assented the other, "no doubt about it, and," he continued gloomily, "we'll be having Sylvia hats, Sylvia gowns, Sylvia cigars; we'll put up our money on a horse named Sylvia, and lose it——"

"What do you think of the show itself?" interrupted the other.

"Oh, fair! It would have a moderate run with anyone else in the lead, but with this girl—why, she's the whole show, and she's it."

Lorimer, of *The Ledger*, strolled up. This was the most critical paper in New York, and had the largest circulation among the solid classes.

"Well, fellows, how's the roast coming on?"

Porter laughed. "Addison and I have just buried it, and are busy turning the funeral meats into a triumphal feast. Want to join us?"

Lorimer nodded. "She's way ahead of anything I ever saw in this line. I don't usually enjoy this sort of thing, but I'm enjoying myself to-night. Have you seen Jim Donelly? I wonder what he thinks about it?"

"I saw him a few moments ago," answered Porter. "He's going to write up a great puff for her."

"Then it's a case of boost all around. Well, I'm glad. She sort of gets hold of you somehow.

I suppose it's because she's so small—seems like such a kid."

"This from you—and at your age, Lorimer?" exclaimed Addison. "I think we had all better have a drink after that. These flights of sentimentality are very often conducive to thirst."

"Everything is—in your case," retorted Lorimer, laughing.

Thus Ruth gained the success which she had come to New York to gain. In the morning, the papers would be full of her triumph. A new star had arisen on the theatrical horizon, and bid fair to shine the most brilliantly of them all.

CHAPTER XXIII

RUDOLF watched Ruth's success, torn with indecision. The worse part of his nature cried out to him that now he held her in the hollow of his hand; that after this she could never go back. The sight of her in her dainty costumes, the sound of her voice, the grace of her dancing, fired the man's blood. At her approach he trembled, and, when she left him, he yearned to start after her and seize her, drawing her back to him.

And yet even in the thought he despised himself for it. The better part of his nature was alert and fighting valiantly. It reminded him of her abhorrence, her contempt when she should know what he was. Under this fear, he told himself that he would be honorable, that he would do the right thing, and, even as he said it, knew that he did not want to.

Two mighty forces were battling in the man's soul, and neither could win. Between the two he was torn as if on a rack. Two months ago he would have taken the ignoble course without any qualms of conscience. He would have figured that he had played for high stakes, and won. He would

have argued that, in putting Ruth on as a star, he had risked his reputation, and faced the possibility of a large money loss.

He had played the game with high stakes when he might have played with low. He had been generous, he had given her everything human heart could wish for, fame, wealth, the applause of the multitude, surely no one could expect him to do all this for nothing. He would have felt that Ruth. struggle as she might against the sin at first, would become used to the changed conditions, and would in time recognize that he had not been unfair. Two months ago he would have argued in this way if he argued at all, and possibly two months hence, under the continued sway of Ruth's influence, he might be able to carry out the renunciation which his better nature cried out to him to make, but which he had not the force of character to do. His life up to this time had not been such as to stiffen his moral fiber to the state in which it would find renunciation easy.

So the two forces strove together, and neither could gain an advantage. But Rudolf had progressed far enough on the upward path to be determined to keep his baser nature in check as long as he possibly could. Thus the scales were evenly balanced, and a very little circumstance would tip them one way or the other.

Rudolf was standing by the car, waiting for Ruth to come out. Unable to bear the sight of her any longer, he had left the theater, yet he was not strong enough to forego the ride home with her. He knew that he ought to plead sickness, and take his way alone; he knew that he was putting himself in the way of temptation that he was scarcely strong enough to resist, but he deceived himself with the fallacy that it would be cowardly to run away. So he waited, trembling with excitement.

Finally Ruth came out of the theater.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, Rudy," she said. "I couldn't imagine where you had gone. Wasn't it splendid! I never have been so happy in my life. And didn't Mamie Roberts do well? Now admit that I was right about her."

"And I was right about you," he answered, as he helped her into the car and took his seat beside her. "I said you would make a hit, and you did. Only you did even better than I hoped for."

"I'm so glad," she said, "for your sake as well as my own. People have been saying horrid things about you. I have overheard them from time to time, and now they will have to take them back, won't they? I heard one man say you were crazy to give me the part——" She laughed happily.

The car turned toward the hotel.

"Let's go around Central Park," suggested Ruth.

"I'm much too happy to sleep, and I would like the fresh air."

He gave the directions to the chauffeur, one side of his nature exulting, the other warning him that he ought to make some excuse. His heart was beating violently now. Every word she spoke added to his passion. He dared not look at her, for fear he would lose control of himself completely. He sat staring straight in front of him, one hand gripping the window sill, the other clenched in his lap, and all the while a voice within was crying: "Fool, fool! Take her—she is yours!"

He listened vaguely to her talk about her success, and replied mechanically. His voice sounded far away to his own ears.

Ruth was too excited to notice his strange demeanor. She had gained success! She lived every moment of the play over again, glorying in it. She heard the applause that had greeted her every action. It had been a triumph without a flaw, and it was she, Ruth Lawson, who had accomplished it. It seemed hard to believe that it was she who had done it. How she would have laughed six months ago, if anyone had told her that to-night she would be a star, and yet it was true. She had come to New York poor and friendless, and to-night she stood at the very top, and yet, even amid all her happiness, there was room for a pang of sorrow

for Lory, for Madge, for all those others who had failed. She realized that she owed her success largely to circumstances, the chance meeting with Lory on the train had been the beginning, and since then every circumstance had been in her favor. Even her failure in finding work had been propitious. Everything, since she had left Harbury, had helped her on unerringly to her success. And how much she owed to this man beside her! It was he who had given her the chance, who had made all this possible. She turned toward him.

"Rudy," she said in a low tone, "I wonder if you know how much I appreciate what you have done for me?"

He did not answer, and she looked at him wonderingly.

"What did you say?" he asked a moment later. "I was thinking——"

"You are not very polite, Rudy," she laughed.
"I was thanking you for all you have done for me."

"Oh-that's all right."

They relapsed into silence. The car swept on, gained the upper end of the park, and turned toward home. So far his better nature had kept him in check, but Rudolf's face was bathed in perspiration, and the cool air blowing in through the window brought no assuagement to the fever that was

devouring his body. But he was not unhappy; a joyful intoxication, induced by her nearness, by the fact that she was his for the taking, coursed through his veins, and filled him with a savage joy. And always within him echoed the cry: "Fool! fool! Take her—she is yours!"

The car sped rapidly onward, and dashed out of the Fifty-ninth Street entrance into Fifth Avenue.

"Almost home now; you are doing well," commended his better nature.

"You are letting your best chance go by," jeered the voice. "Fool! fool!"

The car swept down the almost deserted avenue. Suddenly another car darted around the corner of a cross street. Rudolf's chauffeur averted a collision only by a lightning swerve to the left. Rudolf was flung violently against the side of the car, and Ruth was thrown over against him.

At the touch of her body, the man's passions leaped all bounds. The jeering voice was now one of command. All thoughts of honor, all fears of her abhorrence, were swept away. His mind held but the one primal instinct—he loved this woman and he would have her. He seized her roughly, covering her face, her hair, with wild, passionate kisses.

"I love you," he breathed hotly in her ear. "I love you."

For a moment Ruth was robbed of action by the

suddenness of the attack; she lay passive in his arms. Then, with a wild cry, she struggled to free herself. He laughed hoarsely.

- "I love you," he repeated over and over again.
- "Let me go," she implored piteously. "Please let me go."

He released her, but retained her hand in his, while his burning eyes devoured her face. She shrank back in the corner of the seat, her eyes dilated with horror.

"I love you!" he cried chokingly. "I would have asked you to be my wife. That afternoon when you told me—I would have asked you then. When I found out, I meant to give you up. . . . I tried hard, but I can't. I swear that I will hold you as sacredly my wife as if there had been a ceremony performed in a church. I will do anything you wish. We will go abroad—anything."

Ruth shrank further away from him.

"Will you, Sylvia?" pleaded the man. "Say that you will. If you wish, you can remain on the stage. Backed by my influence, your name will be known all over this country, through Europe. And no one need know."

At the tortured expression on his face, she checked the scornful words that sprang tumultuously to her lips.

"You think I would do this?" she said sadly.

"You know me so little that you think I would do this?"

"Why not?" he demanded passionately. "Are there not thousands of women who do not consider a few words spoken in church paramount to everything else? If you were free, I would marry you. Instead, you are married to a man who is worse than dead, who—"

She interrupted him coldly. "I have been gentle with you, because I felt that you could not know what your proposal would mean to me, but I warn you that, if you persist, you will raise up a barrier between us which can never be lowered."

"I have not been ungenerous," he pleaded. "Your success to-night—does it mean nothing to you?"

"If this is the price, no!" she answered scornfully.

His anger flared up. "I love you," he said doggedly, "and I will have you."

She flashed at him a look of contempt, which made him shrink back.

He started to say something, but suddenly the car drew up in front of the hotel. Ruth opened the door, and, springing out, ran quickly into the building.

The half-finished sentence died on his lips. He stared after her, stung to the quick by her action.

His passion fell from him, leaving him cold with shame. In a flash of illumination he realized what he had done, saw himself for what he was, knew that his next sentence would have been a threat. He sank back in his seat, passing a hand wearily across his eyes.

"God!" he muttered; then again, "God!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Lory and Jack were waiting in Ruth's apartments for her return. They had watched her success with deep joy in their hearts. Now, as they waited, they talked of the exquisite Sylvia she had made, of the reception the audience had given her, of her future in the profession, of the success of Rudolf's scheme of advertising, but neither voiced the thought which was uppermost in their minds.

Finally they heard her at the door, and sprang up with words of congratulation on their lips, but at the sight of her face the words remained unuttered. Lory threw Jack a meaning glance, and, with a muttered excuse, he left the room, and a moment later a closing door announced his departure from the apartments.

Ruth sank wearily into a chair. Lory knelt by her side, and threw an arm around her.

"Don't try to tell me, dear. I know already."
Ruth turned a wondering glance on her. "You—know already?"

"I have known from the first, ever since Rudolf offered you a special position in 'The Pari-

sian Milliner.' Ruth, men like Benjamin Rudolf do not do that kind of thing for nothing."

Ruth sprang up, and pushed the other away.

"You knew this?" she said bitterly. "And you let me go on—you, whom I thought my friend!"

Lory rose. "Listen, Ruth," she said quietly. "Hear what I have to say, first, and then you can judge. You were poor, you had to have money. lack and I had tried every other manager in New York, and there seemed to be no chance of getting you on. There were hundreds of other girls who had experience and more pull. Then Rudolf made the offer. Maybe you remember that we did not act altogether pleased because he gave you a special position; we knew what that meant. Well, after you had gone to bed that night, we talked it over. We did not know whether we ought to tell you or not. We knew that, if we did, you would throw the whole thing over. What would you have done then? I had a hard time to get you to live with me just for the summer, and it was only by promising that you would have a position in the fall, so that you could pay me back, that you consented at all. Jack said he was willing to pay your expenses if you would continue to live with me, but I knew you would not do it. I had bluffed that I could get you a job, and I was at my wits' ends

to know how to make good. Then Rudolf turned up. We knew that, if he put you on, he would give you a good send-off, and give you a chance to show what you had in you. To-night proved that we were right in that. If there had been any other mortal thing for you to do, it would have been different, but you never could have gotten a job which would pay you as much as you needed, anywhere else but on the stage. You had to have money, and this was your only chance. We may have done wrong, I don't know, but we did the only thing it seemed possible to do."

Ruth listened in silence. "I understand," she said at last, with a great weariness in her voice. "You did only what you thought best. Perhaps it was best."

Lory was filled with surprise that Ruth took it so easily. She was also very much relieved. She had expected hysterics and a scene. She was glad that Ruth was ready to bow to the inevitable. As long as it had to be, there was no use of making a fuss about it.

"Well, anyway," she said cheerfully, "you have made a big hit, the biggest I ever saw. Rudy certainly spread himself; you must give him credit for that."

Ruth flung her head up proudly. "I give Benjamin Rudolf credit for nothing," she said coldly.

"It was a trap, a trap deliberately prepared. I thought at first that it was a moment of madness. I could have forgiven that. But now that I know the truth, I shall have nothing more to do with him. Even while I am playing in 'The Parisian Milliner,' I will not speak to him if I can help it."

Lory stared at her. Twice she started to speak, and twice she hesitated. At last she stammered:

- "Is it possible that you do not understand now?"
 - "Understand—understand what?"
- "Ruth," said Lory in a low tone, "you speak of your playing in 'The Parisian Milliner.' Don't you understand, you will not be allowed to play in 'The Parisian Milliner' unless—— You speak of traps—'The Parisian Milliner' is the bait. Do you understand now?"

Ruth looked bewildered. "But the contract—he has signed a contract."

"It is not worth the paper it's written on. Unless you have money to fight a case in court, a contract is worthless."

A look of utter horror dawned in Ruth's eyes. "You mean——?" Then she remembered Rudolf's words, "I love you and I will have you."

Was it possible that he was so vile! At last she was face to face with the shadow. Now she knew how Madge had felt—Lory—all those others. If

she refused, it would mean the end of her success in "The Parisian Milliner." All her hopes. all her dreams, her happiness, would vanish. She had been allowed to taste of all the good things of life, only to have them wrested from her. For a moment, she thought of yielding, but only for a moment. Then she stiffened herself against the blow.

"I will leave 'The Parisian Milliner' then," she said in a stifled voice. "I will get another position. I proved to-night that I have ability."

Lory shook her head. "Not another manager in New York would dare give you a position. Rudolf would sue them if they did, under the pretense that you had broken your contract with him. It wouldn't be the first time a thing like that has happened. You remember Dolly Martin? Well, it happened to her for one."

Ruth could feel the shadow closing in about her, but still she struggled. She would give up everything, she would go back to poverty, before she would consent to this thing.

"I will leave the stage," she said in a strained voice. "I will look for a position in some other line. I know more now than when I came to New York, and I have more friends. Maybe some of them can help me. I will try again."

Lory could not understand this sacrifice of all

for a principle, but she respected Ruth's feelings.

"All right, kid," she said cheerfully. "If that's what you want to do, why, we'll try our best to find you something. It will be easier now than it was last summer. We may strike something pretty good, after all, only—you are sure you want to give it all up?"

" Yes."

"All right, then, but——" She sighed. "By the way," she went on, "there's a letter on the table from Harbury. It must have come after you went to the theater."

At the mention of Harbury, Ruth started. In the excitement of the moment, she had not thought of what the change in her plans would mean to John and his mother. She picked up the letter, and tore it open mechanically. As she read, every vestige of color died out of her face, and she clutched at the table with a trembling hand for support. At last the letter fluttered from her nerveless fingers to the floor. With a cry of anguish, she sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"What is it?" gasped Lory. "For God's sake, tell me what is the matter!"

Ruth motioned toward the letter. Lory picked it up and read. It was a pitiful letter. John's mother did not want to bother Ruth, but the money had given out. She had tried to keep the fact

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from her, but now the neighbors had decided that John must go to the asylum, and she to the poorhouse. She had told them of Ruth's coming salary, but their disapproval of the stage as a profession, coupled with an incredulity that anyone whom they had known could be possessed of talent, had only strengthened them in their determination.

Ruth hardly heard Lory's words of sympathy. At last the shadow had enveloped her; there was no escape. Benjamin Rudolf had laid the trap and circumstances had arrayed themselves on his side. There was only the one thing to do now; the path stretched out in front of her. On either side were walls impossible to surmount. She could not turn aside, she could not go back; she could only go forward. It was not a question of choice, it was not a question of right or wrong; had she been the purest woman on earth or the most vile, it made no difference. Had she been possessed of the strongest character or the weakest, the result must be the same. Nothing made any difference except money-she must have that. She had been through the asylum near Harbury. She had not recovered from the effects of the visit for weeks. At night she would wake up to shudder at the sights she had seen there, of the sounds she had heard. Rumors had come to her ears of crimes committed there, crimes excused in the name of necessity.

sheltered under the guise of legality. Hiram Marsh had died suddenly while in the asylum. The doctors had given a long-sounding Latin name as the reason for his death, but it leaked out that his body was a mass of bruises, and there was an ugly cut on his head. John had believed with many others around Harbury that he had been beaten to death. There had been, at the time, intense excitement, and threats of an exposure, but it had all died down, and nothing was ever done. Nor did the poorhouse bear a much better reputation. She must save John and his mother at any cost.

Not for herself would she have made the sacrifice, not to save her body from torture would she have consented to follow the path. Willingly she would have given up everything, willingly would she have undergone any privation and want, to escape this thing. The very thought of it turned her sick with horror, her soul shriveled within her. Yet for John and his mother—yes; she would do it for them.

And in that moment she seemed to see the vast army of women, the women who are passed by on the street with a sneer, who are looked upon with loathing, for whom no one has a word of sympathy, whom all believe to be following the path because it is easy and pleasant. She seemed to look into their aching hearts masked under the smiles on their painted faces, and read there the truth, deadened though it might be by the bitterness of their fate. And now she was to become one of their number. It did not seem possible, it could not be true! She looked back over her happy girlhood, her marriage with John, and their life together. She remembered little instances replete with joy and love and innocence. Not one thing in all her life pointed toward this, yet this was the end of it all. Utterly unsuspecting, utterly undeserving, she had been caught in the grip of circumstance, against which her most frantic struggles would be useless, vain.

Yes; this was the end of everything. For her there could be no more hope, no more joy, no self-respect. She would be dead in the midst of life. Her life, her real life, would end here, now. Henceforth she would be a puppet, acquiescent to fate. She would not struggle; she was through with all that. Like Madge, she had done her best, and failed. For her failure, she was punished, and the punishment was—this!

Then a great bitterness surged up in her heart. Where was God that he would allow such things? Could it be possible that he was the ruler of the world, and yet looked down serenely while his children were forced into torture by circumstances? What were these circumstances? Were they a re-

sult of blind chance, were human beings but puppets at the mercy of chance happenings, endowed with character, consciences, only as a mockery? She had lived a right life; she had been true to herself, to her fellow-beings, and to her Maker. Was this her reward? She seemed to see the whole human race a multitude of chips tossed about on a raging torrent. Some caught in the current in the middle of the stream bobbed serenely on toward the goal; others, gripped by eddies, were thrown upon the shore helpless and devoid of the power to continue the journey. Still others were caught, as she was caught, in whirlpools and drawn down into the muddy depths. For a while she also had been one of the fortunate chips borne onward by the main current. Had nothing intervened, she would even now be sailing placidly on, all unknowing of the eddies and whirlpools which proved so disastrous to others. She would have scoffed at their power, would have believed that it was she who was steering her course so grandly, would have been self-complacent that she was better, more skillful. than the other chips. And John—he was one of those thrown upon the shore, while yet his voyage was hardly beginning. He had thought himself strong and self-reliant and powerful, had scoffed at the power of the current to do aught else but bear him on wherever it pleased him to go. In a

moment he had been cast aside, while the stream swept on.

She wondered dimly what had been the beginning of it all. Where had the current which was now sucking her down into the whirlpool first been felt? Was it when she had met Rudolf, or further back when she had smiled at Lory in the train, or was all this the result of John's accident? Maybe the beginning was even further back still, when John had bought Prince. There was a chain of circumstances, composed of little links, a chain which would have been incomplete without any one of the links, but, as a whole, it bound her so that she could not escape its remorseless grip.

When Ruth at last spoke, her voice was lifeless. "Please look up Benjamin Rudolf's telephone number."

- "What are you going to do?" asked Lory in agitation.
- "I must have money at once. I will ask him to telegraph it to Harbury for me."
 - " Then---?"
 - "Can you ask, after reading that letter?"

CHAPTER XXV

It was twenty minutes, twenty long minutes of exquisite torture to the distracted woman before Benjamin Rudolf arrived, and at the end of this time she had relapsed into a waking-dream state.

At the sound of his quick step outside her door and then his knock, she felt herself rise and throw open the door. Something told her that she must play her part; must carry out her side of the bargain. She was to sell herself for money, money for John and his mother. She must appear attractive, otherwise Rudolf might repudiate his bargain before it was made.

Strangely enough, her New England conscience, going off at a tangent, told her that no matter what this man had done, no matter how he had trapped her, no matter how vile he was, that in acceding to his terms she bound herself to fulfill a tacit agreement. She must keep herself just as she was when the price was offered; she must not sulk, she must not seem blue or dissatisfied, she must not appear unhappy, for that would be cheating—dishonest. It made no difference how dishonorable he was, that would not excuse it in her.

He entered quickly. "You sent for me—you are not ill?"

She heard herself answer, "No, not ill—I wanted to see you."

He waited for her to continue. She stood before him, a mockery of a smile on her face, her nervous hands twitching at her dress.

"Well," he said at last, "what is it, Sylvia?"

She did not know what to say, she could not think, she stood wondering what would happen next. Then she heard, seemingly without any volition on her part, her voice say:

"I must have money—I need money—I want you to telegraph it to Harbury for me."

"Certainly," he replied. "How much?"

Again her voice sounded in her ears: "I don't know—a great deal, I think. I have just had a letter—they need money. I don't know how much. I have no idea how much."

"You may send as much as you want," he said. He reached for his check-book.

Then suddenly a bubble of anger, rushing from the very bottom of his mind, darted to the surface and burst into a bitter speech:

"It seems to be all I am good for."

She drew in her breath quickly.

"Pardon me," he said instantly, "I don't know why I said that; it was an unpardonable rudeness."

Ruth stared at him uncertainly. "But," her voice said quaveringly, "you don't understand."

He turned his eyes on her. "Understand?"

Her hands gripped each other painfully. What was she to say now? How was she to tell him?

"In the car—to-night—I—I—"

"Sylvia!" he cried hoarsely. He did not move, but stood searching her with his eyes.

She could say nothing. Her voice seemed to have failed her. She looked down at her hands writhing in her lap. There was a tiny drop of blood on one knuckle. She gazed at it in wonderment.

"Sylvia!" he cried again. "You don't mean—"

After an eternity her voice answered, "I've changed my mind."

He sprang toward her with outstretched arms. Suddenly she was shaken back to herself. With a cry of dismay she drew back, and a shudder of repulsion shook her body.

"Am I so terrible?" he asked bitterly. "Is it true that all you care about me is to get money, fame, everything from me and then hate me?"

"I don't hate you," she moaned, driven on by John's need.

"Then what is the meaning of all this? Why did you send for me? Why are you telling me you have changed your mind? What is the meaning of it all?"

A sudden desire to get it over with surged into her mind. She braced herself for the falsehood.

"I have changed my mind," she said, but her voice wavered. "In the car, I was surprised—I didn't realize. All this luxury, fame, everything, means more to me than I thought. I—I have changed—my mind."

She forced her eyes to meet his. Their gaze met and interlocked. He seemed to be looking down into her very soul. She dropped her eyes.

"I've changed my mind," she reiterated weakly.

"I don't believe it," he said bluntly. "I don't believe it, Sylvia."

She looked up frightened. Was she to fail John after all, in the hour of his greatest need? She started to speak.

"Be quiet," he said sternly. "I want to think." She relapsed into silence, watching him with wide eyes.

He stood musing. "Ah, I have it," he said at last. "That letter from home—they need money and you were afraid I would not let you have it. Is that it, Sylvia?"

She could struggle no longer. "Yes, that is it," she said in a suffocated tone.

He laughed bitterly. "So you thought that badly of me? Well, no wonder!"

"I---" she said in agitation, "I thought---"

"What did you think?"

Suddenly she plunged into feverish recital. "I thought it was a trap. I thought I would not be allowed to stay in 'The Parisian Milliner.' I thought I would be poor again, and they need money at home, to keep John from going to the asylum. Oh, it is a terrible place!—they beat people to death there. I have to have money—there seemed no other way. Was I wrong? Has there been some terrible mistake?" Hope, springing up in her breast, raised her voice almost to a scream. "Tell me—tell me!"

"You were right," he said harshly. "It was a trap—at first. Afterwards—I don't know. I am not a good man, and I love you." He laughed mirthlessly, and began his restless pacing of the room.

Unreality closed in again about Ruth. She sat motionless. She could not think, she did not know what to say. Presently some one would pull a string, she thought, and then she would move, but she could not voluntarily.

"So you are willing to do this?" Rudolf flung over his shoulder at her jerkily.

"There seemed no other way," she said tonelessly. "Yes."

He resumed his pacing, and again there was silence. Ruth watched him dully.

Suddenly he laughed aloud, recklessly, mirthlessly, a grating, discordant cackle.

"Let the cards lie as they have fallen," he said raspingly. "Besides 'The Parisian Milliner,' this luxury, fame, all the rest of it—how much cash? Tell me the whole of the price."

His brutal words stung her back to life. "Oh!" she cried.

"Will a thousand be enough—two thousand—five—what is the amount?"

She sat silent, staring at him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed roughly, "I see. I am to fix my own price. Very well. I will telegraph the money to Harbury at once. To whom shall I send it?"

She answered mechanically, "Mrs. Henry Lawson."

Unnecessarily he took out a notebook and wrote it down.

For a moment he hesitated, looking at her with a strange expression on his face. She gathered herself together, her heart pounding sickeningly. Then he turned abruptly to the door.

"Good-night!" he said, and was gone.

The sleepless night was drawing to a close. A dim light filtered through the curtains in Ruth's room. Somewhere in the building she heard the

closing of a door. Below in the street the rumblings of the electric cars grew more frequent. The honking of automobile horns came at less lengthy intervals. The city was awakening. A new day was coming into existence. In a short while the sun, climbing up out of the sea, would flood the city with his cheering rays, but they would find no answering light in Ruth Lawson's soul.

For that was in the shadow, the terrible insinuating shadow that was everywhere in this awful city. It had now completely enveloped her. She could see its solid walls on every side, she could almost touch it, and yet in grim mockery it held aloof. She had sold herself to Rudolf. Already the money derived from her sale was in Harbury. He might claim her when and how he chose. Some day he would, perhaps to-day. She moaned, a feeble, heart-stricken cry.

A stray hope creeping warily into her mind, that he might never claim her, was shattered in an instant. The picture of the happiness of John's mother, when she received the sorely needed money, came to her weak and devoid of the power to cheer, or to lessen her suffering. The knowledge that she had done only what she must—that, in sacrificing herself for another's need, she had gained the heights of unselfish nobility—carried no solace.

There was room in her mind only for the horror, the shameful, soul-rending horror.

Yet never once did she think of evasion. The compact was made—it was too late now to think of withdrawing, and, besides, to her peculiar texture of mind, the fact was already accomplished—she had sold herself. Something in the innermost part of her being told her in no uncertain terms that she had crossed the line—she was now on the other side.

At noon Lory called her up on the 'phone. "Do you want me, dear?"

"Yes; oh, yes, Lory!" Ruth answered.

Lory came, asking no questions, demanding no confidences, soothing, with her sure touch and boundless sympathy, the girl's distracted mind. As she was leaving, she hesitated: "There is something maybe you ought to know, Ruth, dear. Jack blew in from Philly early this morning, and at the station he met Rudolf with a suitcase and a lot of junk. Rudy said he was going South and would be gone for a couple of months."

In Harbury, the winter of zero weather; the tre the December sky, the gratening in its mantle of snewhere, not only on the mi body any harm and filled t generation with ecstatic journal cisterns and, worst of taining the water for Deablutions.

"Curse it!" he cried ang tening layer with his tooth tween his parted lips his br of steam. "Curse it! Why God-forsaken hole?"

The thought of his own apartments in New Y

more successfully this time, with his hair-brush. After accomplishing this feat, he slopped the water in his face, puffing and blowing like a porpoise.

One could see at a glance that the doctor, or rather, surgeon—for such he was—did not fit in with his surroundings. His corpulent body, with its pink skin showing beneath the sleeves of his silk undershirt, was not in accord with the prim aspect of the Puritan bedroom, nor was the temperature one in which Doctor Barney would flourish. His natural habitation would be among the flesh-pots, not the vulgar flesh-pots, but those which a fastidious and educated taste alone could enjoy, for Doctor Barney was a finished product of a finished civilization.

The reason for his presence among these conditions so foreign to his usual surroundings was simple: Doctor Barney had burned the candle at both ends, one being his love for surgery, the other his love of the good things of life. By rigorous physical training, he might have been able to bear the strain of his many and difficult operations, or without the operations, his mild dissipations would have produced little if any effect on his health, but the combination was too strong, and one day he had collapsed at an operation. His friends had immediately raised a clamor, which was echoed by a secret fear in his own mind, and the result of

it all was that he had protestingly exiled himself to Harbury, where he was staying with an old aunt of his. He had decided to remain here two weeks, and this he was determined to do, although now, on the fourth day of his visit, he could easily see that it would be the most miserable two weeks of his life.

His aunt was a pleasant enough old lady, but she held the idea that talk of operations during mealtime, or any other time in fact, was out of place. and she took no interest in rare china, the collection of which was one of the doctor's hobbies. nor did she listen with interest to the doctor's descriptions of the epicurean dishes to be obtained at the Amarynthus Club, nor indeed did any of his discourse interest her. She still looked upon him as the little boy who used to trample her flower-beds. and break her window when his mother brought him for an occasional visit to Harbury in the sum-Sometimes Doctor Barney rebelled against this attitude on her part, and spent much time and expended a great deal of breath trying to convince her that his name was held in vast respect in New York, but his efforts were useless; she smiled soothingly, and remained unconvinced. So, altogether, it was but natural that the doctor was unhappy.

This morning he descended to the dining-room in gloom. Another long day must be put in, and

he did not look forward to it with pleasure. As he neared the dining-room, however, the fragrance of the breakfast greeted his nostrils, and, despite himself, a thrill of pleasure ran through him, for Doctor Barney dearly loved his eating. He entered the room with a more sprightly step. A little old lady with sharp black eyes, and wearing a frilled lace cap, was already seated at the table placidly eating her breakfast. Doctor Barney realized that another mark for tardiness had been registered against his name. He put on his most winning manner:

"Good-morning, Aunt Mary! You are looking as bright as a flower this morning."

"Good-morning, Horace! You are late again." There was mild reproof in her tone.

Inwardly the doctor made uncomplimentary remarks about people who rise before daylight, but aloud he humbly begged forgiveness for his infraction of the rules.

"Did you put on the chest protector I left out for you, Horace?"

Horace had not. "I did not see any chest protector," he prevaricated uneasily.

"Then you had better run right up and put it on. You know your health is delicate."

There were two things Doctor Barney despised. One was, to be ordered, even in so mild a way, to

do anything, and the other was, to be told that he was delicate. Also chest protectors were, in his estimation, the last proof of inanity. But there was a tone of command in his aunt's voice which even now, at the age of fifty-five, he did not dare disobey.

"I'll put it on after I get my breakfast," he said crossly.

The old lady said nothing, but went on eating calmly.

Doctor Barney began to fidget. "Will you ring the bell, please," he asked at last, "so Nettie can bring me something to eat? I'm hungry."

Miss Mary Barney smiled sweetly. "Certainly, Horace—just as soon as you have put on your chest protector."

He scowled. "You treat me as if I were a child," he said sulkily.

"All men are children," she returned placidly.

He waited a little while, hoping that she would relent, although he knew from experience that she would not. Then he went upstairs, and angrily donned the offending article.

The breakfast would have been looked upon by many as a liberal reward for such a small matter; the biscuits were of the lightest, and the coffee—well, even he had to admit that no one could make coffee quite like Aunt Mary—and the eggs and

bacon were delicious, but they served to lighten the doctor's gloom only a small fraction.

"I think I'll walk down to the postoffice," he remarked as soon as he had finished. "I am expecting a letter."

Before Doctor Barney had started away from the haunts of civilization, he had been induced to make several promises to his friends. He had promised that he would not perform any operations. nor would he read any medical books or magazines of any kind, nor talk to any other physician or surgeon on medical topics. In short, he was to forget his profession, and rest. But there was one thing which Doctor Barney had not promised, and that was to refrain from writing letters. He had not intended to take advantage of this technical error on the part of his advisers, but the first day in Harbury had reduced him to such a state of boredom that he vielded to the temptation, and dashed off a peppery letter to a colleague who held diametrically opposite views concerning a certain operation. He had purposely made this letter as insulting as he could so that his brother surgeon -they were warm friends-would be sure to answer. It was this answer that the doctor was now braving the elements to get. Nor was he disappointed, for the postmaster handed him out a fat envelope, addressed in a spluttery hand, which

showed his brother surgeon's state of mind. Doctor Barney did not wait, but tore it open at once. Before he had read to the end of the first page his ire was aroused.

"Why, the man is a fool!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "The man is an ignorant fool. Any number of authorities bear me out on that point, there's——" He dived into his memory for the name of the surgeons who agreed with him, but not one could he remember.

"Curse it!" he muttered angrily. "If I only had my library here, I could soon show him that he is talking like an ass."

He left the postoffice, and started up the street, still trying in vain to recall the names which had escaped him. Suddenly his eye fell upon the shingle of Doctor Northall. This was always a point of sore temptation to him. He always longed to go in, and talk to the one man in the place who knew the difference between the occipito-frontalis and the tendon of Achilles. Up to this time he had refrained, remembering his promise, but to-day the thought of certain books within the doctor's office added its weight to the temptation, and he fell. He threw a guilty look around, then advanced boldly up the path.

Doctor Northall himself came to the door, and the tone of mingled respect and pleasure with which he greeted the great surgeon was like balm to the latter's ruffled feelings. Doctor Barney plunged at once into his grievance. "So, you see," he wound up, "the man is an idiot."

Doctor Northall rose and went over to a bookcase. He selected a book, and turned the pages quickly until he came to the passage he was looking for.

"Here is one authority who upholds you," he remarked, handing the book to the other.

Doctor Barney took it eagerly. "Why, certainly—Von Bergmann—had him on the tip of my tongue, but couldn't quite make it."

After this the two men were brothers in feeling, if not in fact. Doctor Barney could pour out the story of his successful operations into untiring ears, and his spirits revived by the moment. Once in a while his promise rose to confront him, but he ignored it. There was no use being foolish about a thing like that; he could not be expected to go two whole weeks without even talking about his profession. A little chat like this was the best thing in the world for him; it could not possibly do him any harm.

"By the way," said Doctor Northall at last, "there is a case here in Harbury which I think would interest you. Of course I understand that you are here to rest, not to hunt up fresh cases,

but I think you would be interested to hear about it."

At the mention of a case, Doctor Barney pricked up his ears. It was like a blast of a bugle to a veteran war horse.

"Why, certainly, I'd like to hear about it. Lord love you, man, this is the best word I've heard since I left New York. A case, eh? Well, fire away. What is it?"

Doctor Northall plunged into a description of John Lawson's condition, and did not want for an attentive listener. When he had finished, Doctor Barney asked one or two questions in a rapid-fire manner. Then he arose and paced the room in deep thought. Finally he stopped in front of Doctor Northall.

"I believe it can be done," he said excitedly. "Weigman says it can't, but I know better. Still, there's a chance——"

"He would be better off dead than living the way he is," answered the other soberly. "If you think it right to operate, I am willing to stand my share of the responsibility."

"When can I see the patient? Does he live near here?"

"We can go now."

"Good!"

It was only when, later in the day, Doctor Bar-

ney had telegraphed to New York for two trained nurses and an assistant surgeon that he realized how fully he had broken all promises. He viewed the matter philosophically, however.

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he remarked contentedly.

CHAPTER XXVII

JOHN LAWSON opened his eyes, and gazed up into the face of Doctor Northall.

He smiled feebly. "Prince got away with me," he said, his voice thin and weak, and was astonished to find that this simple statement should bring such a look of joy to the doctor's face. He wondered also who the other man was, and why there should be two women in the uniform of trained nurses in the room. Nor could he understand why they should all shake hands as if something wonderful had occurred. While he was speculating as to what it all meant, he fell asleep.

When he awoke, his mother was by his bedside.

"Hello, mother," he said cheerfully. "It seems I had a little accident last night."

His mother dropped on her knees by the bed. "My boy, my boy!" she sobbed. "Thank God, my boy, my boy!"

"They are making a tremendous fuss about me," he said to himself; "must have thought I was going to die. There, there, mother," he went on, "don't you worry; it would take more than a little bump on the head to——"

He stopped abruptly as his gaze wandered past her out of the window.

"Jerusalem!" he ejaculated, and stared in astonishment at the bare trees covered with little patches of snow.

He rubbed his eyes and looked at his mother. He reached out and touched her. Yes, she was certainly real—he could not be dreaming. A look of horror dawned in his eyes.

"Mother," he gasped, "Ruth—the child?"

His mother rose and sat down on the bed beside him. "Ruth is well, John." She spoke gently, but there was a pain in her voice he could not understand.

"And the child?"

"It died, John-it lived only a little while."

He groaned. His mother rose hastily. "Try to bear it bravely, my son," she said. "You must not talk any more to-day. Try to go to sleep and save your strength."

"But this is winter, I was hurt in May-what?"

"Not another word," she said. "To-morrow I will tell you all about it."

The next day his first question was of Ruth. The mother, pale-faced and red-eyed from a sleepless night of weeping, braced herself for what must come. This was the moment to which she had looked forward with terror ever since she knew

Then had come a letters, which nevertheless was satisfactory, but paid girl to send money home. came the news of the pro stage. This letter—enthus: filled the mother with vag over and over, trying to m all was right, but she could the struggles of young wor on the stage, and this leap part—just what that was s it sounded important-frigh this man, Benjamin Rudolf such an interest in Ruth? the door of her mind, but s to enter.

Then, later, marked copie sent by "faire " "

Gossip did not neglect this golden opportunity. She hovered buzzard-like over Harbury, fattening herself on the luscious morsels, nor did her votaries spare the shrinking, heart-broken woman, but under guise of sympathy retailed to her what "they say," and when a drummer, having a friend in the chorus of "The Parisian Milliner," chanced into Harbury, and told what was then common rumor in theatrical circles, the mother heard every word of it—cruel, ugly words which destroyed her last atrophied hope and burned into her quivering soul like white-hot irons.

It had been while her fears were clamoring, but yet unverified, that she wrote and told Ruth of their need of money. It had been immediately telegraphed, an amount out of all proportion to their needs, and this same Benjamin Rudolf had sent it. She had been forced to accept it; there seemed nothing else to do. She despised herself for the helplessness which made her a recipient of such bounty, but she could see no way out of it. John needed her care—she could not leave him, even if by so doing she could gain a livelihood for him and herself. And yet, despite her knowledge that she was doing only what she must, it would be impossible to overestimate her humiliation; no one could know. But Nature knew, and Nature marked

it indelibly with a thousand wrinkles on her brow, and turned her hair snow-white as a token.

During all this time pity for her son was far and away ahead of any emotion she felt for Ruth; indeed, at times, she was terribly angry with the girl—almost hated her. Why had she done this thing—how could she?

"Perhaps," suggested the still small voice of her intuition, "there was no other way. Perhaps she did it for you and John."

The mother cried out in agony against the thought. She beat her hands distractedly against her withered breast. "Oh, God!" she cried. "Not that—not that!"

And when she thought of the moment when she must tell her son, when he would demand to know of his wife, and she, his mother, must tell him this ghastly thing——

And now that moment had arrived. She stood speechless and trembling, her hands clasping and unclasping, straining together until the knuckles seemed about to start through the flesh.

Quick suspicion sprang to his mind.

"Tell me!" he cried. "Don't stand there like that. Tell me."

And the mother told him, the whole pitiful story as she knew it, beginning away back at the night of the accident, told him between bursts of sob-

bing, softening the blow—if, indeed, it could be softened—pleading for the girl, extenuating, evading, until he stopped her with:

"I've heard enough." His voice was hard, brutal. The look on his face was terrible. The mother, frightened, stammered and faltered.

"I want to be alone," he said.

After his mother had gone, John lay perfectly quiet. From the expression of iron-hardness on his face, one would little imagine what the man was suffering. He had driven forth that night in May, which was his yesterday, in superb confidence in himself and supreme happiness and trust in his wife. Now he had awakened to find his business gone, his home wrecked, his wife an outcast. would be false to say there was no pity in his heart for her, but it would be equally false to give it a place of undue prominence. His was the race that had burned unoffending old women at the stake, the race that has ever punished sin with an intolerant and unflinching hand, the race that stifled every human emotion when it conflicted with its idea of right.

In extenuation of him it must be said that he knew nothing of Ruth's struggles—the girl had kept them from the mother—nothing of the long, weary, heart-breaking months before she gained her present pinnacle of worldly success. He knew

to a craving for luxury.

And, because of this in heart against her and new mind of his right to judy dence. He lay motionless, ing with unseeing eyes, and escape his lips.

A random harking backw called his boastings on the 1 before the accident. "If a makes his own circumstances the circumstances that could laugh was forced from him.

What a fool he had bee further, nor did he extend the to his wife's case. Every hardened him the more, and eousness of the father

He rang a small bell beside his bedside, and his mother appeared.

- "Mother," he said in a toneless voice, "I want you never to mention her name again in my presence. Furthermore, I forbid you to write to her or have anything to do with her. Do you understand?"
- "Yes, John," she answered, trembling. "But about the money she sent—what shall I do with that?"
 - "How much have you spent?"
- "I have kept account of every penny, John—just two hundred and four dollars and seventy-five cents. She sent five thousand. I felt that I could not use it—not a penny more than I had to—but I did not want to hurt her feelings, so I let it stay in the bank."
- "Let it stay there, then, until I can pay it all back."
 - "But, John-"
- "Don't try to argue with me," he said angrily. "Do as I say, and don't spend another cent. If we can't get credit, we'll starve."
- "Oh, we can get credit now, John, now that you are better again."
- "Very well, then. Now remember, you are not to write to her. I don't want her even to know

The mother lingered a r. then went out.

CHAPTER XXVIII

As the days went by and John regained his strength, his prevailing thoughts were of business. He would open another store in Harbury—he felt that he could borrow enough money for that. Vengeance, too, occupied an uppermost place in his mind, and Sam Brunt was to feel the weight of it, for, taking advantage of her need, Sam had cheated John's mother shamefully in the deal—the store was worth four times what he had paid for it. Very well, Sam would have him to reckon with now. He would force him out of business, if it were a possible thing, and he thought it was, if he made his plans carefully.

And not only against Sam Brunt did John harbor malice, but against the whole community. He felt keenly his humiliation, and read in every face contempt for him. He meant to compel back the respect he had once held in Harbury, and which he felt was now denied him. As a matter of fact the contempt was not there. The village had satiated its love of the sensational on the wife, and the husband now had its deep and real sympathy.

Each person in Harbury vied with every other in

speaking loudly of his deep feeling for John. When he had been rising toward success, Harbury had been jealous of him, but now even the meanest of her inhabitants could say truthfully. "I would rather be myself than John Lawson." And it is this state of mind which is most conducive to sym-After all, human emotions should not be dissected too nicely, for, much as a man would wish to rejoice in the success of a friend, the tiniest factor of jealousy is bound to creep in; but, on the other hand, let that friend be hopelessly down, so that every favor to him becomes an act of benevolence, and real pity springs into the heart. is perhaps only natural that each human being should wish to keep his plane a little higher than that of his fellows.

John's mother was sorely troubled about her son. She scarcely knew the altered John. He had always been a little hard and stern even as a boy, but then there had been other qualities that modified these traits and kept them in the background. It seemed now as if hardness was his predominant habit of thought. She saw it not only in the big things, but in a hundred little ways, and she was frightened. And she was suffering keenly for Ruth. Had John disbelieved, or had he, even though believing, shown any leniency toward her, it is entirely probable that his mother would have taken

an opposing position in the matter. As it was, when John refused to speak of his wife, or to allow her name to be mentioned, the mother swung to the other extreme. Every sacrifice Ruth had made in the days before she had gone to New York, every act of affection, every happy, girlish way, came before her eyes in recurrently more vivid pictures until at times she did not care what Ruth was or what she had done, she felt it was John's duty to take her back and let the past be wiped out. And with these thoughts came the terrible realization that she and John were condemning the girl entirely on hearsay evidence. Several times she timidly tried to lead the conversation to Ruth. but the look on her son's face left the words dead on her tongue.

So the woman worried and pined, and her worn constitution weakened steadily, and when, a month after John's operation—when the new year was scarcely a fortnight old—she contracted a slight cold, it became serious and developed into pneumonia.

John sat at her bedside day and night. Somehow he knew—long before the doctor had given up hope—that his mother would die. Strangely enough, underneath the feeling of sorrow and loneliness, Iurked a sensation of relief. He had felt his mother's silent disapproval very strongly, and now his

hands would be free to deal with the world as he wished.

At last Doctor Northall gave up hope. Laying his hand on John's shoulder, he said:

"John, your mother is going; she will not last until morning."

John nodded, not taking his eyes from the bloodless face. At the very last she rallied, and drew her son's head down onto the pillow.

"John," she whispered, "see Ruth-promise."

Her lips moved unavailingly, and then he heard:

- "Some mistake-maybe-see Ruth-promise."
- "There, there, mother; everything is all right. You will soon be better."
- "Promise," she gasped. "I am dying—promise."

The look in her face wrenched at his heart. He hesitated.

- "Promise," she implored, clinging with frantic strength to his hand.
 - "I promise," he said.

With a sigh she closed her eyes, and Death stretched forth his hand and touched her.

CHAPTER XXIX

RUTH LAWSON was still playing to crowded houses. She was, if anything, more polished in her acting. She sang as well, and danced as gracefully; yet there was a something lacking, the something which had made her reception so instantaneous on that first night of "The Parisian Milliner." Only those who had seen her then and afterwards returned to see her again, noticed it, and even they were at a loss to account for the difference. They went away puzzled. One of these was Lorimer of *The Ledger*.

"I can't explain it," he confided to a friend.
"In many ways she gives a more finished performance than on the opening night, but she has not the same appeal she had then."

"I guess you liked her better then, because it was the first time you saw the show. Now, it's an old story to you."

Lorimer shook his head. "No; it isn't that. Somehow she impressed me the first night as being happy, light-hearted, and all that, but now—well, she doesn't, that's all."

"It must take a pile to make her happy, then,"

commodity?"

"I'd take a chance."
"Well, if you ever do, I

disappointed. But, just the Ruth Lawson is unhappy. I think so, for I can't tell you, bu

Lorimer was right: Ruth w ately unhappy. She could dra her anomalous position. Rudo she had not heard from him, where he was, but every gleakindly feeling for the man because light-hearted thought that was instantly blighted by the dand that return might come at

Nor was it for herself alone erable. As it had been with came to New York, she was at that she

mind. It seemed to her a city clinging to its blindness as a protection against that which it does not wish to see, a city filled with charities which serve only to mask the true conditions, which act as a salve to heal the surface of the foul growth lest it offend the eyes of those who wish to remain in simulated ignorance, while the malignant ulcer eats and eats into the lives and morals of its victims undisturbed.

Ruth's heart had grown very tender toward the dregs, the outcasts of life, the life which shows so bravely on the surface. She too, she felt, was one of the outcasts; she too had been beaten down in the struggle; and at times the misery of it all swept over her with such force that she cringed and cowered as under the lash. And so the days dragged by. The new year was born in the death of the old, the January thaw hardened to the February freeze, and now March had come in blusterous and disagreeable.

One day Ruth's maid awakened her from her morning nap.

"Miss Lory is here, madam. I did not wish to disturb you, but she insists. What could I do?" She spread out her hands in comical helplessness.

Ruth smiled. "Nothing, Celeste. If Miss Lory insisted, I am sure you could do nothing—but obey. Tell her to come right in."

- "Say, Ruth," said Lory excitedly, "have you heard from Harbury lately——"
 - "No," answered Ruth. "Why?"
 - "The devil!"
- "What is it?" cried Ruth, starting up in suffocating alarm.
- "Well, I guess there's no use beating around the bush. You know Doctor Barney, the surgeon—well, Jack met him last night and he said that he had performed an operation on a patient by the name of Lawson in Harbury, and the patient had recovered his senses. It must have been John all right."

Ruth's first exclamation was one of joy, but it was checked almost before it was uttered.

- "I know," said Lory sympathetically. "It's fierce, isn't it? And the worst of it is that the operation was performed in January, and here it is March."
 - "In January!" Ruth gasped.

Lory nodded her head. "Don't you see, dear, he's heard a bunch of gossip, and he's sore, the saphead. Pity he couldn't come and see—find out for himself—and after all you've been through for him. Honest, Ruth, if I were you, I'd forget him—he isn't worth anything else."

Ruth heard Lory's voice dimly. The horrible fact had struck her with crushing force. John had

not come. He was well again, and he had not come. She buried her head in her hands.

Lory burst out in a string of abuse against the man.

"Don't," Ruth pleaded. "Please don't, Lory. He doesn't understand."

Lory relapsed into silence, sniffing disdainfully.

Ruth did not weep, she was too stunned, and a decision was forming slowly in her breast.

"Lory," she said at last, looking up. "Lory, I'm going to Harbury. I'm going to tell him everything. I'm going to Harbury to-day."

"All right," Lory answered unenthusiastically. "It isn't what I'd do, but maybe it's the best thing. Do you want to go alone or shall I butt in as far as the station in Harbury?—I can wait for you there."

"Oh, thank you, Lory—but really I would rather go alone—I have so much to think over."

But Ruth did not go to Harbury.

It would be hard to marshal all the factors in her decision not to go. Two contending forces strove in her mind, the one demanding that she must fly to John, to make him know how he had misjudged her, to regain his love, to feed her own upon the sight of him. "Just to be with him," cried her heart,—" just to see him, and hear his voice."

Equally strong, the other force, the force of her

. oca nei snaipij,

tell John when she reached
"Will you tell him the
him murder Rudolf and be
or will you tell him nothingby the force of your love;
care of itself? Will you bro
Rudolf, or will you fulfill it,
rance? If so, how?"

Then, having shaken her tionings, it directed at her unpl can't tell him all, and he will less. He is already suspicious demned you; anything short would only add to his certain you dare not tell him all. Y compact with Rudolf. It was John from going to the asylur operation which

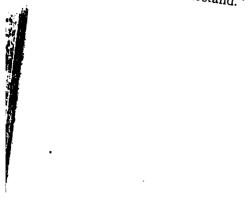
would understand without her telling him all. She would make him promise not to harm Rudolf. She could soon pay Rudolf back the money he had sent to Harbury. Maybe, when he found John was well, he would release her. Maybe he would never come back. Maybe——

And so she strove, laboring distractedly with herself, arguing, pleading her right to see John, trying to force fallacious arguments on her skeptical mind, but in the end she was compelled to give up.

It was not until she was in the station and it was nearly train time that she decided definitely and irrevocably that she could not go, that one more sacrifice was demanded of her, one more sacrifice and far from an easy one to bear. She must be silent. Knowing as she did how high her motive, which had led her into this compromising position, had been, knowing how much she had sacrificed for John, knowing how hard she had struggled and striven to help him when he needed her,-knowing all this she must be silent, and let him think the worst of her, let him think that she valued fame and luxury above her honor or his, that like a silly girl she had been attracted by the baubles with which the world tempts the weak and foolish. Yes. she must keep silent and bear this additional burden.

Anger against him, because he did not know her

does not understand."



CHAPTER XXX

As John Lawson progressed toward perfect health, his bitterness and hardness increased, nor was the self-confidence of the man lessened. His whole overshadowing thoughts were, as they had been in his early convalescence, devoted to his business future. He erected in his mind mighty air castles, but they were not, as on that May day so many months ago, gorgeous and romantic, and filled with peace and love and contentment. They were grim and gray, with frowning turrets, bleak against a lowering sky. His mother's death did not alter a line of their architecture, nor did ever a thought of Ruth, intruding itself against his will, change an angle of their craggy magnificence.

He knew he would succeed. The blows dealt him by Circumstance had only hardened the fiber of the man; the two years of inaction should be made up and speedily. He would open a store again in Harbury, but it would be merely transitory, a means to an end, a stepping-stone to the greater things which were to come, and which even now he looked upon as realities.

His debt to Ruth had ceased to trouble him.

ret, with all his hardness careful to hide his feelings. He wanted their trade, their would find out what he thoug the most observant saw be friendliness, but they were few vaguely puzzled, and doubted Besides, John's conduct in the going had made Harbury was for John had become religious, a which they understood.

Before his accident he had nothing more. Now it held an his life. It was a hard, stern any of the love and tenderne which form so great a part c Jesus. It was culled from the sages of the Old Testament hittern

hold his little world in his hand, and dispensed justice, hard, cold justice, with an unrelenting severity. Possibly in worshiping this deity of his own contrivance, John was but worshiping an emblem of power; perhaps he seized upon this figurehead as a lodestone to beckon him onward on his march toward power. Or perhaps he wished to conciliate this terrible being into showering blessings, worldly blessings, upon him. Whatever the explanation, John's religion was very real to him, and the church edifice saw him in regular attendance every Sunday. So Harbury, looking no deeper than the surface, and with admirable logic, concluded that his catastrophe had been an act of Providence for his regeneration, which would now progress very nicely, since Ruth and her frivolity were not impeding his footsteps in the right direction.

It was shortly after the death of his mother that John paid a visit to Doctor Northall.

"I want to go into business again," he said directly. "I need money. Can you let me have it? I will give you a share in the business or pay any reasonable rate of interest. I believe the whole-salers will carry me, but I need a certain amount of cash."

"Certainly, John; certainly!" cried the older man. "I should have offered it long before this, only I did not want you to think too much about I will need at least a th
"I haven't got quite that
other regretfully. "I've or
and some odd, but you are
maybe I can scrape up a lit
it be enough?" he asked anxic
John felt suddenly ashamed.

leaped to his heart, but he cru make it do. Thank you, doc much it means to me. And the terms?"

"None at all, my boy!" crie
"Pay me back when you canand I certainly would not thir
interest." The old man gazed fc
How often had Doctor North
some man, woman, or child a
little all! Sometimes it had

them the old man's blessing, and sorrow that he had not more to give!

- "John," said the doctor some time later, "have you heard from Ruth?"
 - "No," said John shortly.
- "Have you written to her?" The doctor was fumbling with a paper-cutter and looking over John's head at a picture on the wall.
 - " No."

The doctor dropped his eyes to John's face. "You are wrong, John," he said kindly. "You are young and you are hurt. Believe me, my boy, I know just how badly you are hurt, but you ought to write to her—see her—something—you promised your mother—""

"I would rather not talk about her," said John coldly.

Doctor Northall sighed, and said no more. His was not a persevering nature.

John left the doctor's office satisfied with his visit. As he strode along, a smile lit up his face, a smile of satisfaction to think how shrewdly he had managed the situation—how quickly he had increased the amount of his request, how easily he had evaded giving the old man a share in the business, and with the satisfaction was a feeling of contempt for the doctor's lack of business sagacity. And yet in the man's soul there was an uneasiness—the same old

uneasiness that had been there so much of late. It was in no way connected with Ruth, or with his mother's death, or his financial condition. It was a soul uneasiness, a stirring of a disregarded conscience. It said to him vaguely: "You are on the wrong track; you are starting on a path that leads to the shriveled soul, the lonely, friendless life, the death of your better self, the loss of everything that makes life worth while."

"Nonsense," retorted the practical side of his nature. "You are starting on a path that means success, that will give you all the world has to give—wealth, prestige, power, greatness, everything."

"They are nothing," urged the other.

"They are all I want—now," said John out loud, and he meant it.

Yet the unrest remained, but it was to grow weaker day by day, smothered by the luxuriant crop of weeds that were even now rooting themselves firmly in the man's soul.

He continued homeward, planning with bold strokes for the future. Only once did he think of Ruth, and then it was only to be glad that, in whatever success was to be his, she would have no share.

CHAPTER XXXI

Benjamin Rudolf was at Palm Beach, where he had come immediately after leaving Ruth. impossible to say whether there was more of satisfaction for his impulsive action in the man's mind. or contempt for himself because of it. At times he had idealistic dreams in which Ruth, the central figure, occupied the position of a canonical saint, while he worshiped respectfully, from a distance, at her shrine. In these moods he would plan what he would do for her, unobtrusively, asking no reward, content merely with her friendship, and some day she would recognize his love for her and respond to it. For, in his highest flights of idealism, Rudolf never lost hold of the belief that some time Ruth must come to love him. In fact, all his idealism was to be more or less of a pose to impress her, yet who can say that it would be the worse for that?

At other times, however, he regretted exceedingly his course. He called himself a fool, and accused himself of melodrama. Especially did he hold in contempt his leaving without seeing her again. Yet in reality it was the one absolutely unselfish,

the one absolutely pure, the one absolutely godlike act of his life. Shaken to the foundation of his mind, by her plight, and the realization of what she was suffering because of him, he had shed self, and risen to greater heights than he knew. Now, the normal Benjamin Rudolf looked back at the moment skeptically and doubted his sincerity.

Palm Beach did not distract him; the gayety, the life, the lights, the music, the ever paraded insistence that joy and amusement were the chief ends of life, wearied him. He was in no mood to enter into the outward show of pleasure, and he wanted to go back, he wanted to see Ruth. He promised himself time and again, if he went back, he would content himself with the rôle of friend—all he wanted was to speak to her, to hear her voice, to gaze upon her, and feast his eyes upon her beauty. But, if the man's natural skepticism of himself had taken away the laurels for his good action, it was no less ready to strip naked his promises. Rudolf knew in his soul that his only safety lay in staying away from Ruth for the present.

And yet, underneath it all, the man's character had developed to a remarkably high point, considering his beginning. He was still far from the heights, but he was nevertheless even more distant from the depths in which he had been wallowing when Ruth came into his life. The animal lust for

her had changed first to a low order of love, which had slowly but surely grown finer in texture, until now it was not to be discounted. Yet, in spite of the prevailing opinion that a man looks with complacence on the good that is in him, and belittles the bad, Rudolf did not realize his own gain. He felt that whatever purer motives he now held were forced upon him by the necessity for becoming more worthy in Ruth's eyes. Perhaps he was right.

At any rate, there had been born in his mind a scheme which would have far-reaching effects on both his and Ruth's life. That afternoon he had written to a manager who was to put on a play similar in character to "The Parisian Milliner," and suggested that he make an offer to Ruth to take the leading part. He had no doubt the man would do this. Ruth's presence in a production now guaranteed its success, and Rudolf would advise her to accept.

Thus would all their business relations be severed at a stroke; he would come to her an outsider, he would win her if he could from no point of advantage. Perhaps her husband would die; perhaps some day she would consent to a divorce; perhaps, although he doubted it, she would come to love him enough to scorn the conventions. The man believed in his star, he believed in his destiny. With the intense optimism of his race, that opti-

And he wanted Ruth—w mently as he had at first, b to come to him, willingly; her to crave him as he was cr times he felt she would.

To-night, as he was sitting thought, his eyes roamed was kaleidoscopic picture of constant passing people, brilliantly dreaful to look upon, men in the clothes, young girls in the freatumes, with yet something oldering of freshness, in their faces rested by a well-set-up figure and walked toward him:

"Hello, Horace! Didn't society."

Doctor Barney snorted "

Rudolf laughed. "When did you come down?"
"Got here last night, and you?"

- "Oh, I've been here some time, couple of months or so."
- "Well, you must have a strong constitution. Smoke?"
 - "Thanks, but I've just finished."

Doctor Barney lighted a cigar and puffed comfortably. "Great thing, tobacco. Great mind who first invented it—who was it, Columbus? No—Raleigh?—no—now who the devil was it? Rudy, you ought to know. Saw your star show the other night. Good—fine! That Ruth Lawson's the best I ever saw. Ever hear about that operation I performed for clot at the base of the brain? Weigman said it couldn't be done. Name of Lawson reminded me—chap by same name up in a little one-horse town in Massachusetts. Entire success. Patient's as well as ever. Weigman was wild. Claims now he never said it couldn't be done."

The doctor chuckled gleefully, not noticing the strained attention of his hearer.

"What did you say the man's name is?" Rudolf asked, his voice well under control.

"John Lawson—same name as your star. Can't be, by Jove! Yes, it is! First thing he came out from under the ether, he said, 'Ruth—sister—wife' —what relation are they, do you know, Rudy?" to New York.

CHAPTER XXXII

RUDOLF reached New York in a reckless mood, his mind full of ugly thoughts. Once more Fate had stepped in and thwarted him. All the reconstruction of the last year had dropped from him, but in its desertion it could not immediately coarsen back to its original flabbiness his conscience. That would come later. The mind may change at a bound, but character changes slowly, and conscience, that silent monitor whose approval or disapproval is absolutely apart from anything which the reason or will or desire may urge, changes last of all.

So Rudolf arrived in the city a man half crazed by his wild desires, his sense of the injustice of Fate. He had asked only for time; he was being honorable, he was denying himself even the pleasure of Ruth's company, he was conducting himself in a perfectly irreproachable manner, and here came Fate dragging into the game, in an entirely unwarrantable fashion, the husband. Ruth, no doubt, would return to Harbury, return to her grocerystore man, to the ridiculous narrow village, and finish her life among sordid, uninteresting surround-

men of the way!

And with these thoughts Ruth. Why was she so narrow be broad enough to ignore the lives could be a veritable parad

He drove at once to her hotel. ful, agitated—received him. A he almost gasped. Could this with deep lines under her eyes—freshness of youth fading from Sylvia who had tripped so smilin the acclaim of the audience on "The Parisian Milliner" only last he checked the utterance of sym to his lips. He thrust out the that leaped into his breast.

"What do you hear from yo asked gruffly.

" NT - " "

you know what a country village is. He does not know."

"You have written?"

She shook her head. "I couldn't—explain——"
He fell to pacing the room. "You mean you

couldn't explain me—no, I see you couldn't." He was silent for a moment.

"Sylvia," he burst out passionately, "give him up—he isn't worth it. A man who doesn't care enough for his wife to come and find out is a low sort of animal. Why can't you forget him, rise above it? There is lots in life for you yet. You are young, everything is before you. Even if he 'understood,' as you say, could you ever be happy in Harbury living with such a man? Remember, it was different before; you were a country girl, you were, you must have been by the very forces of your environment narrow and provincial. Now you are broad, you have tasted the larger things of life. You have been a dweller in the city. Would Harbury content you now?"

"Yes," she said, "with John—yes."

The man was exasperated. "John! What has he done? You left Harbury to work for him, you sacrificed everything for him. What has he done in return? Cast you off because of gossip."

"If he knew," she said proudly, "he would not."

"Oh, of course!" he said sarcastically, "if he

"He would!" she cried vehe if he knew the circumstances." "Never!" he reiterated. ".

it. His New England horror w Inherited male tradition, comi countless centuries, would have with a mind like his. No, no,

never do it! He would not e 'circumstances'!"

"He would!" she cried, fighting breast.

. "Are you willing to put him to "What do you mean?" she ask Rudolf was suddenly calm, Ti of the man, the belief in his dest shown him a path, a narrow path in and out among disastrous-loc ing abvece of

if John, hearing everything, and believing that you sacrificed yourself for him, wants you as much as he did before you were married, if he feels that whatever came to you was his fault, that all his life he can never make it up to you, if he believes your story absolutely, without proof of any kind, then I will say that I am misjudging him—that he is worthy of you. But he will not," he added with a short laugh.

- "I don't understand, yet," she said, bewildered.
- "No?" he said lightly. "Well, I'll explain. There are two things only which you need to understand. First, forget all that occurred on the first night of 'The Parisian Milliner.' Forget the money I sent to Harbury. I release you absolutely from any obligation which you may feel it involved."

She started up with a cry of joy. "You mean-"

- "Yes," he returned, smiling. "Rather the return of the prodigal in a way, isn't it?"
 - "Oh, how can I thank you!"
- "For letting you climb out of the mud puddle I pushed you into? It is noble, isn't it?"
 - "You must not talk that way. If you knew---"
- "Secondly," he interrupted, "you will go to John to-morrow and tell him everything—every little detail about your life in New York, except that

- "Oh, he will!" she cried jounderstand."
- "Just one word more," he door, pausing with his hand o less he accepts you unreservedly, you are entirely guiltless, unlesstory implicitly, then you are not—do you promise?"
 - "But he will. I know-"
 - "Do you promise?"
 - "Yes," she said.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

THE train bearing Ruth Lawson was nearing Harbury. All day her mind had been in a state of Rudolf's act in releasing her from exaltation. all obligations to him had left her a free woman again. The joy of her escape was only less keen than the joy of the anticipated meeting with John. For a moment, the night before, when Rudolf had been so positive in his statement that John would not understand, would refuse to take her back, would disbelieve her story, fear had clutched at her heart, but with the morning it was dissipated, and now she looked forward to seeing her husband with no dread. Supreme in her own knowledge of innocence, she felt that he could adopt only the one course-that of love and contrition and sorrow that she had been through such terrible experiences.

And, on the whole, she was glad Rudolf had suggested the test. Strive as she would, her mind had harbored a shade of resentment against John for remaining silent, for not coming to see her as soon as he was able. But now, as soon as he had stood the test,—and she knew he would,—all that would be wiped out. She would feel that, no

matter what might have happened to her, no matter what she might have been, no matter how she might have dishonored, technically, his name, his love for her would have survived. And then as soon as he should show the nobility of his character, his broad-mindedness, and refute Rudolf's misjudgment, then she could tell him the truth, the blessed wonderful truth. At times tears of joy stood in her eyes.

The train swept shrieking around a curve, and came within sight of Harbury. Ruth strained her eves for the old familiar landmarks. There was the brook, there the wide fields of the Braddock farm, and there the Braddock mansion itself, but, no, that could not be it, that little, stiff brick house on the hill. Ruth had remembered it as an imposing edifice. Now it seemed shrunken to a quarter of its former size. She stared at it in wonder, but a succession of houses, which she remembered, swept by, and no one of them tallied with the picture in her memory. Only Nature remained the same, or even more imposing, for the broad sweep and roll of the land, the wooded hill, the bare gauntness of the yet unfoliaged trees, spoke to her with a restful grandeur she never felt in her girlhood days.

"Harb'ry!" shouted the brakeman.

Ruth drew a long breath and rose. As she de-

scended to the station platform, it seemed to her ages since she had left this village, yet in reality it was less than two years, but those two years had held a lifetime of living, of suffering, of emotion, of knowledge of the world. She had left Harbury, innocent with the innocence of ignorance, the innocence coming from absence of temptation. She returned innocent, having been tried in the fire of the world's fiercest temptations. She had left Harbury as a girl, she came back a woman. Ruth was prone to think of herself as old, or at least middleaged. As a matter of fact, she was just over twenty-two.

As Ruth passed through the station into the street, she came suddenly on Mrs. Braddock, sailing majestically along, a stately brig propelled by a favoring wind. But the sight of Ruth was like a squall coming suddenly out of a clear sky. Taken aback, she stopped, quivered, reared high her head, and sheered violently to one side, and continued on her voyage bobbingly as over a choppy sea.

Ruth stood staring after her; there was no mistaking her attitude, recognition had shown on her face, quickly followed by horror, contempt—any number of cruel emotions.

The girl paled, then pulling herself together, continued on her way. But she was shaken to the depths of her being. No matter how one prepares

lift, to hear silence in place of is possibly one of the hardest beings are called upon to bear

Suddenly Ruth saw Harbury bigoted, not understanding, colief that its little world was allife were the last word, detern of its ridiculous misproportione kept from contamination at any streets themselves, narrow and s stiff and unbeautiful, yes, the velladen with that indefinable som gerated, false perspectived, cod New England conscience. And doubts of John's ever being able t over her in overwhelming force.

Mrs. Braddock had taken

as she approached, and once, turning around, impelled by a sudden curiosity, she beheld little groups here and there watching her from a safe distance.

She had intended asking to be directed to John, but now there was no one to ask. Ridiculous problem as it was, it was nevertheless real; she had come all the way from New York to be temporarily thwarted at this point by an absurd contingency. Still she might go into a store and ask. She was nerving herself to it, when some one came with quick strides from behind and a voice sounded in her ear:

- "Why, Ruth-how are ye, Ruth?"
- "Finn!" she cried, her heart leaping in pleasure.
- "Ye ain't changed a mite," he asserted.

Ruth smiled, but her smile was very sad. Then a thought struck her.

- "I must hurry along now," she said. "Where can I find John?"
 - "I cal'late I'll go along and show ye, Ruth."
- "No, Finn, you mustn't," she said gravely. "You must not. People will——"

Finn raised his voice in anger. "Can ye stand plain words, ma'am?"

Ruth nodded.

"People be damned!"

She laughed. "Finn, that is an awful thing to say out loud, here in Harbury."

As soon as he was out of be a little back of where he ha

Ruth did not answer. H
cast a cloud over her hopes
above his environment? In t
doubt, all the opening senten
had planned to greet him, see
place. She wondered what she
Lohn's store was on the main

John's store was on the mai below where Sam Brunt's sig Model Grocery. Sam stood an without a sign of recognition. out onto the sidewalk and wa John's place. Finn stayed out at Sam, and checked an utterant be on the end of the man's tong

In a moment Ruth came out. she said in a bewildered

enan - ' .

CHAPTER XXXIV

Lory was worried about Ruth. Ruth had taken the rebuff much more calmly than, Lory felt, the situation demanded; she herself had experienced a terrific burst of anger when she heard of it. Indeed, Ruth had relapsed into an apathetic state of mind, and this attitude frightened Lory much more than tears and raging would have done.

Now Lory was trying to cheer Ruth up, and the sight of the girl, pale and haggard, with dark rings under her eyes, sitting in the big chair quietly, her suffering eyes fixed on Lory's, hearing without comment the latter's highly colored version of her recent doings, filled Lory's mind with foreboding, in which there was just a trace of annoyance.

"See here, Ruth," she said abruptly, "you've just got to pull out of this—you've got to. You've done exactly right, and you know it, and I know it, and everybody knows it, except your husband, and he's too thick-headed even to want to know."

"I know," said Ruth wearily. "I do try, but——"

"But nothing!" exclaimed Lory. "You've got to. Now just let's take a look at it from an out-



looking for work, and car got a family to support. 5 -can't do it. Finally she de one that will fix her family she finds it's tagged with a don't want to pay it, but t so she does. You didn't ha your husband thinks you di to. Well, what of it? Ha self-sacrificing girl, isn't she know that, so do I, so does Gc marks Hannah's name way 1 a couple of harps for her That's good-common sense, is if I blow any slush into this to talk horse sense.

"Well, so far so good. No ried. Her husband was sick, she came to New York to won gossip fills him up to the being

he don't ever want to see her again, won't even go to her and find out why, where, and how. Too sore to bother with her at all. Well, maybe there's something to be said for him, having such a little two-by-four, twisted head-piece, but his being that particular kind of a worm puts him out of Hannah's class. She is big and broad and good and sensible. She did right, although it looked wrong. He is doing wrong just because it looks right. See the difference? Now here's the point. Listening, Ruth?"

Ruth nodded.

"Well, then, here's the point. Here's where Hannah comes to a stone wall. She's young yet, say, twenty-two or so, and her life is ruined, and her husband has thrown, her down, and she feels like the devil, and she's bang up against a stone wall. Now the easiest thing for Hannah to do is to stay right where she is, on her side of the stone wall, and keep looking back, and wishing things had been different. You see, that's the thing she would be tempted to do, for her mind and heart are plumb full of her side of the stone wall pictures. So she can stay on her side and mope around, make herself miserable, give her friends a pain, do nobody any good, and grow old in a year, and look like sin. That's the easiest thing for Hannah to do.

"But there's another bet, and Hannah can take

into new diggings and be as if nothing had happened. Ruth; it's what you ought to said you had a letter from people about that part for r. Cut Rudolf and me and Jack rest, if it will help to keep you over the wall. Begin here, no to carve out a new life. Put you storage and forget everything the future. See?"

Ruth sat silent, for a long tir strong character were arrayi Lory's side. Yes, she would c she would make a new life for gain success, happiness, she we out of them by the circumstanc her down. Her face flushed, ar arms of her chair clenched.

"You're going +- '

- "Name it—it's yours. Ask me for my new hat —you can have it."
- "If you and Jack and Rudolf and the rest will help me."

Lory departed before noon,—she was to meet Jack for luncheon downtown,—and Ruth dressed and went down to the dining-room for her lunch, the first time for many a day she had taken a meal outside her apartments. All the time she was pondering over Lory's advice. Yes, Lory was right, the stone wall was high, but she could get over it, she must get over it. It was not only for herself, but her friends. How kind Lory had been, and Jack, and how noble Rudolf was!

In these last few days, Ruth had been compelled completely to alter her opinion of Benjamin Rudolf. He was wonderful. It seemed as if the whole of his conduct toward her from the opening night of "The Parisian Milliner" had been blotted out, had been but a bad dream. Had he been mad and suddenly returned to sanity? Or was not his present attitude something above ordinary sanity? Ruth's knowledge of the city, of men and their ways, inclined her to think that it was.

Later in the day Rudolf called.

"And how is Sylvia to-day?" he asked, his old customary greeting.

ing back, and look forward, imposing my troubles on my 1

"Lory is a wonderful girl lieved. "But your troubles, keep them to yourself, Sylviaif you share them."

"You are always so kind,

"I wonder if you realize how He winced. "Please——"

"Oh! I know, but that is all i and forgotten."

"Yet the trail of the serpen "I wonder," she said half sa it ever vanish—but, no," she co ent tone, "we must not think future I want to think. So yo to accept the offer of the lead

Man '?"

long. Especially you under mine. Even yet some people are attributing your success to favoritism of some sort, though how they figure it I don't know. Usually the box-office receipts are indisputable."

- "That sounds well," she said, smiling quietly. "What is your real reason?"
- "Will you excuse me from answering that question?"
 - " No; I want to find out your reason."
- "Well, then, it is because I want to be merely your friend and not your manager. It is a very high ambition, Sylvia, to be your friend." There was a trace of wistfulness in his voice.
- "So you wrote to Girard and Company and told them to make me an offer?"

He laughed. "Yes, and now I have confessed all of my sins."

She was quiet for a long time.

When she spoke again it was about a book which she was reading.

CHAPTER XXXV

RUTH'S visit caused Harbury to do a strange thing, and yet it came about in a perfectly natural way. Harbury knew that Ruth had come to see John, and it expected a luscious scene. "What did she say? What did he say?" were questions ready on every tongue. Somehow the news would be sure to leak out. And when Harbury found that John had avoided seeing Ruth, and thus cheated it out of its desired scandal, it was justly indignant. Then one of its inhabitants remarked, "I wouldn't 'a' treated a dog thataway."

"No," replied another. "Anyways, how does he know that all this here gossip is true?"

Thus there issued a tiny spiral of smoke, which presently developed into a flame, which in its turn rapidly assumed the proportions of a conflagration. Directly in its path was John Lawson. He felt the heat of it long before any word was spoken to him, felt it in the lack of fervor in his next morning's greetings, felt it in the diminished trade for the day, and, besides, he felt it in his own inner consciousness. For John knew even when he was avoiding Ruth that he was making a mistake, but

in a sudden weakness he had allowed his sudden distaste for seeing her to get the better of his judgment. Whatever the outcome might have been, it would have been better to have had the meeting, and had it over with. Had his fellow-townsmen vindicated his action, probably he soon would have been reassured, but, as it was, he was forced to defend his conduct to himself, and thus view it, as it were, through hostile eyes.

In the center of the conflagration, fanning it with heated words, was Finn Jones. The man's anger was thoroughly aroused. He, more than anyone else, had been in a position to see the effects of John's action. He had helped Ruth, trembling, fighting back the tears, trying not to let him see how deeply she was wounded, back to the station and put her on a train, which, providentially, was scheduled for that hour of the day, and so now he was a leader of opinion against John. According to him, riding John out of town on a rail would be none too severe a punishment.

"Ain't it the right of every cit'zen to have a defense?" he cried, waving his arms. "Ain't it in the Constitution? Suppose everybody was jedged by old women's gossip, where would any of us be? No, sir; I cal'late John Lawson thinks he's pretty smart, but I say he ain't no man to treat his wife that way."

"'Specially after the way she worked and slaved fer him," said another.

"And that's another p'int," said Finn. "We kin remember all about what took place after the accident. We kin remember the way she run around lookin' fer work, and when she couldn't git it, hiked off to New York, jest as plucky as could be. Whose fault is it, whatever she done, anyway? If John hadn't been so crazy, drivin' that horse, nothin' of the kind would 'a' happened, would it?"

And so it went, but it remained for Doctor Northall—mild, retiring Doctor Northall—to clinch matters. "Beware of the anger of sheep," says an ancient proverb.

He walked brusquely into John's store at closing time. "Something to say to you, John," he said sharply. "Hurry and close up, I can't wait." John wondered at the tone.

"All right," he answered—" in a minute."

He closed the store, and ushered his visitor to the back room, in which he slept. The older man closed the door.

"I want to know why you didn't see Ruth yesterday. What's gotten into you, John? You're behaving like a child, and a damned bad child at that."

"That's my business," said John stiffly.

"Your business, is it!" roared the other. "Then, by Granny! that money I loaned you is my business and you'll pay it back. Your business, indeed, you impudent young whelp! I'm old enough to be your father, and you talk about your business to me! Didn't I see Ruth when you were lying on your back, helpless, working her life out for you, you big lumbering hulk, and yet you talk of your business!"

John said nothing. He sat, his eyes moodily on the floor, but his jaw was set, and he was the picture of stubbornness.

The old man stormed around the little room for a brief time, and then his anger began to melt:

"Look here, my boy," he said more gently. "Don't you know you are on the wrong track, don't you know that it was your duty to see Ruth, and hear what she had to say? Remember you have been judging her without hearing her side at all. There may have been some terrible mistake. Besides, John, you promised your mother, you promised her on her deathbed, and that is just the one promise no man can break and still be called a man. Now admit it, John, you were wrong. Do all you can to rectify it. Go to New York like a man and hear Ruth's side, and then act accordingly, but be kind, John, be kind. Just because you're hurt, don't be cruel; there's a sight of cruelty in

this world and not half enough kindness; help tip the scales the other way a little."

John was silent for a while. "You're right, doctor," he said at last. "I will go to New York and see Ruth the first day I can get away from business."

The old man started to say something, but checked himself. Then he shook John's hand and went out. At the door he paused. "Oh, John! About that money, that was only a bad-temper speech—I did not mean it."

Soon it became circulated about that John was going to New York to see his wife, and the animosity of the town died down, but speculation was rife, and even some bets of a modest character passed as to whether she would return with him. The bettors holding the affirmative, however, demanded odds.

John should not be judged too harshly. To the man in his position—as the position disclosed itself to his belief—there are only two courses open: either the erring woman shall be taken back without an atom of reserve, without a reproach or sign of the past's having existed, or she shall not be taken back at all. There is no intermediate course. And John was temperamentally, and by virtue of his education and environment, unable to do the first. Every atom of his being cried out against

it, and yet he hated himself for his feeling. In fact, this self-hatred was the basis of his harshness against her. Let a man but be sure he is right, and he is mild, temperate in his thoughts and speech. The blusterer, the intemperate of utterance, the brutal of action, is the doubter of his own mind.

It was some days before John appointed a time to go to New York, and then the time set was a week off. He wanted to be ready, he told himself, to be prepared. He wanted to settle in his mind just what he should say in case Ruth took the one course, and was shameless and defiant in her sin, blaming him and circumstances; or, on the other hand, penitent and begging to be forgiven. His belief that she had yielded to a craving for luxury, he never questioned; it was only her attitude about which he was speculating.

And in his heart he determined that nothing she could say, no amount of pleading on her part, would alter the result. She was a sinner—she must abide by the results of her sin. Perhaps he would be very sorry for her, perhaps it would cut him to the heart to carry out his decision, yet it should be unalterable.

He wondered whether she would tell him the truth.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JOHN'S letter to Ruth, announcing his coming, preceded him by only a few hours; she received it in the morning, and at four o'clock his train was due to arrive.

It would be almost impossible to exaggerate its effect upon her. It seemed to her, coming as it did after months of neglect and after he had refused to see her in Harbury, a complete surrender, apology, on his part. Urged by a sudden overwhelming impulse, she rushed down to Rudolph's office and begged him to release her from her pledge. In the face of John's change of mind, it seemed absurd that she should test him, absurd and childish, theatrical—she could not do it.

Rudolf hesitated. Like many another man, he found that every act foreshadows another. It is understood, rather generally, that one bad action brings another in its train. It is less universally believed that the correlation is equally applicable to good actions. But such is the case. Rudolf's hesitation could have but one end.

"Do you want it so much, Sylvia?" he asked, trying to gain time. "Wouldn't it be better—"

- "Oh, no, no! It would be so unfair to him—it would show such a lack of trust. I must not do it. I cannot do it."
- "Very well, then," he said gloomily, "you needn't."
- "Oh, you are so good, Rudy!" she exclaimed.
- "Don't," he said hoarsely. "Please don't—and would you mind if I excuse myself now, Sylvia? There is a man waiting to see me in the other room, a man who has come all the way from Chicago."
- "Why, of course," she said, rising, "I must not take up your time. But will you not congratulate me, Rudy? I am so happy."
- "I am glad that you are happy," he said in a tired voice. "Good-by, Sylvia!"

He took her hand in his, then dropped it, and turned abruptly to his desk.

The train from Boston was five minutes late. Ruth stood shivering with expectancy behind the iron gates, shutting out waiting friends from the station platform. It seemed to her that all the last two years had been shaping themselves toward this moment. This was to be the climax of her life. In a few moments she would meet John, she would be in his arms, she could tell him of his terrible mistake. She could hear his voice, tender and

contrite, as he begged her forgiveness. And how freely she would give it! After all, he had but done the natural thing. He had believed because he heard only the side forcing him to believe. But now how different everything would be! Yet she would not tell him all, not all the ghastly details of that first summer of suffering, nor would she tell him of the narrowness of her escape from Rudolf. In fact, she would not have to tell him of Rudolf at all, except as the very good friend who had helped her so much. Now that Rudolf had given her back her freedom, it would not be necessary to linger on that part of the story at all.

And then the train came in. The passengers streamed out onto the platform, and began making their way toward the exit. Ruth strained her eyes for John's figure, and at last she caught sight of it, towering above the others. At that instant pride shot into her breast. How big he was, how manly, and he was hers—he was her John.

"John!" she cried, when he was yet a little way off.

People turned and gazed at this wonderfully gowned woman, in magnificent furs sweeping the ground, then turned to look at the man to whom she was calling. They saw a very tall, hard-featured countryman with ill-fitting clothes and a collar a size too big, his face set and stern, and

in it no answering enthusiasm to the woman's greeting. They wondered.

But Ruth did not notice, not until he had reached her, and ignored her outstretched hand.

"Where can we go to talk?" he asked gruffly. "We can't talk here."

In a second her happiness dropped from her as a garment. She felt stunned, uncertain. It was an effort for her to say:

"We will go to the hotel. My car is waiting outside."

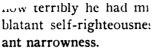
"I would rather not ride in your car," he said with direct rudeness.

She drew herself up haughtily. "That is an unforgivable insult," she said in a low tone.

He did not answer.

She looked up at him, and what she saw shocked her. What she had remembered as strength in his face now appeared to her as stubbornness; what her memory pictured as firmness, cruelty—there was no mistaking that thin-lipped mouth. And in his eyes she saw a deep brooding narrowness of vision. He might have posed for a statue of Justice, that cold, uncaring Justice which weighs only results, nor concerns itself with motives.

Surely this could not be the man for whom she had struggled and sacrificed, her John whom she had loved so completely, whom she had endowed



"Very well," she said subway."

It was not far to the accomplished in silence.

"Now," she said directly her apartments. "Why d

" I promised my mother

"Your mother dead! (matter? Did she suffer—

" Your conduct killed he

"Oh!" she cried.

Then a sudden tremende "You brute!" she said. to me in this way, knowing sip? How dare you cone you bear an ignorant country girl, knowing nothing of the city and its ways?"

She paused for breath, her breast heaving painfully.

"There were many days," she swept on tumultuously, "when I did not have enough to eat—there were days when I was tortured by the heat of the worst summer this city had seen for twenty years, and yet I went on, day after day, looking for a position. Why? For myself—no! I would rather have died. For you."

Her words stung him. "I'm sorry," he said coldly, "that you had such a hard time. Perhaps it was my fault, but I refuse to be saddled with your sin."

"My sin! Oh, my God-my sin!"

She laughed harshly. "Who are you to talk of sin? Have you ever been in a position where you were confronted by starvation, where you could prevent it only by a sin which would hurt nobody but yourself, where you must see your loved ones starve? Suppose it was your mother—John, wouldn't you sacrifice yourself for her sake?"

"It would be unnecessary," he replied. "There is always work for those who want it."

"Is there? How do you know? How do you know what work there is for women in a city like this? And what do you know about the tempta-

tions, the circumstances which push women into sin, the sin you sneer at so readily? I know, and I say to you, John Lawson, that there are thousands of women forced into that sin without their desire or wish; yes, without their consent. I know. I was very near the brink, John, and I know.

"After months of failure," she went on more calmly, "I won success at last; yet, even when I held it in my hand, I found that it could be kept only if I—sinned. I would have refused—I did refuse—and then a letter came from your mother, saying that you were to be taken to the asylum because the money was all gone, and she, to the poorhouse. I consented then, and only then. But the sacrifice was not demanded of me. When I was tottering on the brink, I was pulled back."

He started, and a light leaped into his eyes, then his face again set into its former heavy lines.

"For a minute," he said cruelly, "I forgot you were a play actress."

The words themselves were lost in their import. "You don't believe it?" she cried. "You don't believe me?"

"I believe," he answered slowly, "that you had a pretty hard time after I was hurt. I believe that you suffered after you came to New York, and I am sorry, but you could have done a great many things which you were probably too proud to do.

You could have taken a position as a hired girl. There are always plenty of places for servants."

Ruth laughed. "Go on."

"But," he continued, "you saw a chance for all this," his glance indicated the luxury of the room. "You always did love this sort of thing, even in Harbury. I was blind then, I thought your foolishness was just because you were young—but other people knew—I have heard since."

She laughed again. "What else?"

He scowled at her interruption, and then went on:
"Well, it was a great temptation. Perhaps the
Lord did not give you strength to resist. Perhaps I am not blaming you as much as you think—
but I refuse to be blind to your guilt. The money
you sent my mother——"

"Don't speak of money," she said quickly. "It has no place in a situation like this."

"I will pay it back," he went on, "every cent of it."

He stopped, and silence fell upon the room.

A change was gradually but surely taking place in Ruth's mind. At the station, a transition had begun. John's first look, his first words had started it. Every moment since had fostered it, every speech of his, every look, his very personality, gave it momentum. Ruth could not believe that it was real. She would not admit to herself that it was

true. Somehow it seemed indelicate, monstrous, unbelievable, but at last she was forced to recognize it, for all its strangeness.

She did not care, she, Ruth Lawson, who had loved this man so devotedly, was seeing the fabric of her love woven through months of courtship, of married life, of struggle, suffering, sacrifice, gradually falling to pieces before her eyes, destroyed in less than an hour's insight into the real John,—not the John of her memories, her ideals, but John as he had become by this time.

For John was not the same man she had known and married. He was not even the same man he had been when he awakened back to consciousness. Some natures are made more noble by suffering, some natures soften under the buffeting of Fate, but there are others that only shrink and harden. Such a nature was John's. And in this hardening process, as if to quicken it, he had deliberately set up false gods and was worshiping them whole-heartedly—the God of success, the God of money, and the God of Harsh Judgment, and of the three the latter is the most terrible.

And under influence of this transition all resemblance of this man to John seemed to fade. She saw in him only a hard-faced stranger.

"Is there anything else you wish to say?" she asked at last.

"Yes," he said. "I cannot have my name dragged in the dirt."

"Oh, of course not!" she said contemptuously. "The courts will free you—I will not contest."

"Then that is all," he said, rising.

Ruth stood in the middle of the floor after he had gone. In her mind was an immensely curious feeling which seemed to be a facsimile of relief, and opposed to it a great loneliness—relief that she was not heartbroken, that now there was no need of looking back over the stone wall, and loneliness and grief for her dead.

For John was dead. Her John, whom she had known and loved, was dead. Had she seen his casket lowered into the cold earth, had she heard the inexpressibly melancholy sound of the clods falling on his coffin, had she looked upon the growing pile of earth over his grave, he could be no farther away, no more completely lost to her.

Gradually her eyes filled, and silent tears stole down her cheeks.

ו אבטבי וא nere, madam, נ

would not wish to see him?"

Celeste regarded her mistress :

"I will see him," said Ruth we

Rudolf entered, his face dark

"What has happened, Sylvia--don't try to tell me. I know-

tion—I couldn't keep away—I wa was unpardonable. I followed yo

been waiting outside the hotel.

Tell me only this: Did you tell hir "I tried to. He would not belie

"D—n him!" cried Rudolf. his face—the cur!"

"Don't," said Ruth. "Please do He threw himself into a chair. " I

Hell to-day, Sylvia. At first, becar

he would win you back; then, who

I knew what wor ----

"It's the excitement," he said moodily. "To-morrow—"

"No," she said earnestly, "it isn't that, it isn't altogether that. I don't know just what it is, but I don't seem to care. He's changed so, or something. Perhaps it is I who have changed. I don't know."

Rudolf said nothing, but continued to frown at the rug. After a long time he asked:

"What now?"

"Oh!" she answered bitterly. "He is afraid his name will be dragged in the dirt. He will ask the courts to free him."

He looked up quickly, the expression of his face transformed.

- "Sylvia!" he cried. "Sylvia—I——"
- "No," she said, "you mustn't."
- "Forgive me!" he cried contritely. "Yet you must know all I would say; you must understand, Sylvia."
- "Yes," she said gently, "I understand, and you must understand—I know you do—how I appreciate all you have been to me. You must know how highly I value your sympathy, friendship. And you will understand, won't you, why I must send you away—for a long time, months—years, maybe?"

He stood before her with his face aflame:

"But I may come back, Sylvia? Some time—some day—I may come back?"

"Some day," she said softly, "you may come back."

THE END



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